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The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

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Letter from Cambridge:

Britain and the Brain Gain

DEAR H,

Two hundred years ago Britain lost the American colonies. Now she is losing professors to the United States.

The flow is large. In 1987 about 200 are reported to have moved westwards, and a similar figure in 1988. They are not slow to say why. Academics are supposed to be shy, reclusive beings, but that was before the age of mass media. Now they are interviewed in the daily press about their reasons for leaving, they appear on television and, if really desperate, they write letters of protest to editors. The new brain drain is a public issue. The word, as the debate proceeds, is that it is not just about money, though money helps. The young are furious about being untenured, the middle-aged about being under-funded in research, and the old can be slyly appreciative of eager students and the retirement income that America promises. So, one way or another, they are going.

The traffic, to be sure, is not in a single direction. There was a net outflow of academics from Britain in 1981-82, since when the movements in and out have tended to shift towards a balance. In fact a written parliamentary answer of February 17, 1989 suggests there is now a small though diminishing net inflow into British academic jobs from abroad, the incomers being mainly from the Commonwealth. That net inflow amounted to over a hundred in 1984 and 1985; in 1986 it fell to 87 and in 1987 it was a mere eight. But that underrates the scale of the problem, and there can be no doubt that there is an American mood in British academia, rather as there was in the 1950s—whether to visit, to linger or to stay. The question once addressed to the poet Wordsworth on a walking tour of the Scottish Highlands—"What, are you stepping westward?"—has taken on a new urgency, and the poet Clough's famous injunction "But westward look, the land is bright" is now subject to radical reinterpretation. It is not just young men who go west but young women too, along with the middle-aged and the downright elderly, in search of the setting sun.

There is nothing apocalyptic about all this, whether in personal or national terms; and to teach in the United States, or research there, does not usually mean emigration. It can mean no more than an interlude in a professional life. There is a famous 1855 painting by Ford Madox Brown called *The Last of England*—it hangs in Birmingham City Gallery—that shows emigrants on the crowded deck of a sailing ship, staring in rooted despair at white cliffs, as one imagines, receding forever from view. To cross an ocean, in those days, was to cross forever, and who knew to what fate? The end of the twentieth

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century is not in the least like that. If your westbound British professor travels by sea at all, it is only for the joys of savoring lobster for dinner and glimpsing Manhattan as Manhattan should be glimpsed, from the deck of an ocean liner. And if, as is more likely, he travels by plane, he arrives in time for dinner on the same day even if he is California-bound, and he knows he can go home for the weekend. He keeps his British home, usually, which can be left in the charge of a wife for whom the American way of life is less enticing than it is to her errant husband. "You can't get proper tea," I once heard a British female voice remark in a New York supermarket, but getting the right brand of tea—tea leaves, that is, and not tea bags—can be the least of your problems. The women of Britain are tempering the new brain drain, urging caution and sometimes simply refusing to go. But they cannot wholly prevent it, and the professor is going. He will be back, some day, for a comfortable retirement in his native land, and his comfort will be buttressed, by then, by several solid props. If he avails himself of early retirement from British academia, which can start around the age of fifty, he will enjoy a double income, inflation related, for the rest of a long life, and his life expectancy as a healthy middle-aged man is probably over 80. If he continues to earn from authorship or consultancy, he will have a third income as well. His mood is restless rather than committed, and those receding white cliffs will see him again—often. He will be back and back again.

Government, which is widely held to blame for under-funding British higher education, has its own story to tell about all this, and it is telling it. Mr. Robert Jackson, the minister in charge of universities in the Thatcher government and himself a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, claims that British universities have made a net gain of 360 academics since Mrs. Thatcher became prime minister in 1979. Exchanges of manpower, what is more, "reflect the international nature of much teaching and research," he says, and are "an indication of a healthy university system." Perhaps. But there are still winners and losers among nations, and the minister's figures do not represent the truth that counts. Many of the incomers to British universities are Commonwealth trainees who use junior posts in Britain to complete their doctorates or research projects; many of the emigrants, by contrast, are at the height of their powers and reputation. America loves famous people, and famous recent emigrants include Christopher Ricks, who several years ago left the senior chair of English at Cambridge for Boston University; Geoffrey Hill the poet, who made the same transfer a year or two later; Bernard Williams, who in January 1988 left the Provostship of King's College, Cambridge for a chair of philosophy at Berkeley; and Professor Peter Hall of Reading University, who moved to the same Californian

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campus early in 1989 as a fifty-seven-year-old expert in urban planning. Professor Hall, whose urbanity is better than his diction, has spoken fervently to the press about the intellectual ferment he finds in American universities, where "you are literally bombarded by brilliant graduate students." Let us hope not, though even to be bombarded metaphorically might be bad enough. He denies, as it is usual to deny, that he is leaving for the salary. British universities are constrained by lack of resources, he says, whereas Berkeley has offered him the directorship of their Institute of Urban and Regional Development. Salary is only a part of it. There is the title, the plate on the door, the staff, the well-funded projects and, if all that is not enough, the brilliant bombarding graduate students. America means opportunity.

Such departures are seldom silent. When the Provost of King's College, Cambridge announced his resignation some two years ago, it was accompanied by a press campaign in which the departing Provost, a professional philosopher and a former chairman of an official enquiry into pornography, vilified the parsimony of the Thatcher government in its public spending. British universities have been largely funded by the state at least since the Second World War; and it is only lately, and with marked reluctance, that they have been pushed by public parsimony into such raising of funds from private sources as many an American academic administrator would take for granted. Oxford University, the oldest of all, is now sponsoring an appeal for some 400 million dollars—an unheard-of figure in the context of private university funding in Britain, though there are American universities that would think little of it. Departing professors, who are commonly anti-Conservative in any case, are seldom reluctant to seize the chance, as they leave, to attack a government they in any case dislike, but they may for once have struck a popular chord. A poll in March 1989 showed that only 7% of the British public now want lower taxes, which in the last year or two, and for the first time in memory, have dipped to a point scarcely above the US level, whereas 84% want more public spending. They probably mean on health and schools rather than on universities, but universities are widely seen to have a claim. The British nation is well known to be richer today than ever before in history, its national treasury is bursting with funds, and the stinginess of its rulers towards hospital nurses, schoolteachers and colleges is a matter for reasonable astonishment. No doubt they are worried about refuelling inflation. But for whatever reason, British academic salaries are still strikingly lower than the French, German and Dutch, not to mention the American, even if teaching terms are shorter in Britain and students more carefully selected. Unless something is done, then, the drain will go on, or intensify, and the net gain will not be to the British.

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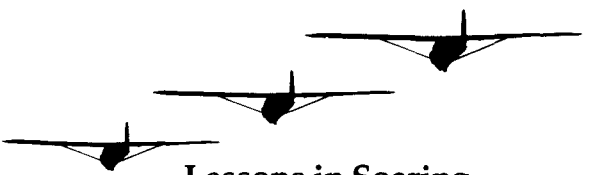

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The American reaction to the westward flow of intelligence can only be interesting to consider. A lively, even tempestuous correspondence over past months in *TLS* suggests an incipient resentment on the western shoreline of the North Atlantic; and Professor Norman Cantor of Columbia, in a striking and memorable analogy, has bitterly remarked that the United States is not a Victorian Punjab, and that US universities exist for reasons other than providing convenient outdoor relief in a post-imperial age for the British intelligentsia. One can only agree. The hypothesis of a New Colonialism is surely engaging, however, especially as there are still some, even in New York, who imagine they stopped all that in 1776. The British may have abandoned dominion over palm and pine, and without much misgiving: even Hong Kong is to be given back to the Chinese in 1997. A voyaging nation, however, by long tradition, they can still be persuaded to settle abroad, and in some ways their bargaining position in a post-imperial age has improved. Whereas they were once in duty bound to supply a trained élite like the Indian Civil Service to administer tropic zones, they now go where and when they like, and only when the price is right. Life in the United States can have its drawbacks, to be sure, even if you pack the right brand of tea and take special care over the marmalade supply. But at least it is better than the Victorian Punjab. If that is the exchange, then the British have done well, on a long view, out of the deal.

They have an answer, in any case, to those who resent their invasion. It is a more or less unanswerable answer, and in the columns of *TLS* they are giving it with eloquence and force. They are there because they were invited to come. Sometimes they were invited several times over. They may even have been the targets of American academic search committees, on occasion, compared with which the importunities of a Calcutta beggar are as nothing. Nor have they been made to feel unwelcome. They are surrounded, they will say, by amiable colleagues and admiring students. Their accents are judged to be cute, their suitings casually enviable, their erudition unimpeachable and their versatility astonishing. They tell anecdotes to audiences less likely to have heard them than their wives, give whimsical addresses to lunch clubs, and are expert at devising compromise formulas at departmental meetings. They seem to savor American life, even if their wives do not, and treat their new environment with a condescension less like that of a Punjab sahib than of a modern culture-tourist, seeking out and finding the best jazz recordings, videos and delicatessens. If there is a chamber music concert on campus, they are more likely than most to know about it, and they enjoy exotic restaurants. They are even rumored, at times, to be asterisks in Evelyn Waugh's diary, and do nothing to discourage the suggestion and little to belie it. They are eminently adaptable to heat or cold, to mountain, desert or distant plain. And to any hint of

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complaint, they return the answer I have ventured to call unanswerable. They are there because they were invited.

To all of which, I suppose, there is nothing to be said, and only the sliding dollar—if it continues to slide—and the greenhouse effect on northern Europe of milder winters and warmer summers are likely to work an effect in time and bring them home to die. Or perhaps sooner: for there are drawbacks as well as advantages, it must be said, to the American campus, and they need to be appreciated by the new academic discoverers, and well in advance of deciding to go at all. It is not just the tea bags. American students, for example, are remorseless about writing papers which they expect you to read and grade. The American academic year is long—much longer than the British—and campus life, unlike the life of a British university, can easily go dead before five in the afternoon, leaving you nothing to do in the long evenings but play Scrabble, watch "Dallas" or struggle to extend your sex life beyond its natural term. There are hazards here of which the guidebooks do not speak.

American social life, what is more, is full of mantraps, and represents a minefield for the unwary. Consider, first of all, the matter of language, which can raise perilous issues of idiom when you move west. A British professor in California who remarked of his secretary, whom he had left behind in London, that she was coming across may be forgiven for a lapse which, strictly speaking, was little more than lexical, and a dialect expert could explain the matter to him in a moment. The Englishman who, in the act of beating his knuckles on the door of a colleague, remarked to a passing stranger that it was time someone was knocked up was readily put at his ease after a misunderstanding that caused no more than a ripple of embarrassment. But there are wider issues than these. How, as a Frenchman asked me the other day, can you have over 200 million people without cynicism? How, as one British visitor once asked another, can you live in a country without pubs or irony? How indeed? The fact is that the European visitor has to watch himself in the United States. His anecdotes, though they may appear no more than whimsical in an Oxford common room, can sound demeaning in lands where decorum still rules; and even in New York City there are ethnic stories for which the audience needs to be chosen at least as carefully as the wine. Nor is critical behavior commonly tolerated in a British lecture room always acceptable in an American classroom. American students are not just politer than the British. They are also more respectful of ancient values. They are studying history or literature because they admire it, and they expect you to admire it too. The British student, by contrast, tends to abandon that view, if he ever had it, in his freshman year. Richard Eyre, now Director of the National Theatre in London, has told how in his first year at Peterhouse, Cambridge he was asked by his mentor, Kingsley Amis, whether he thought the jokes in *Twelfth Night* were in fact funny, and discovered that even Shake-

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speare is there to be criticized. Such lucidity can look brutal and unfeeling on the other side of the Atlantic. Literature is good, great literature is great, and that is why you are studying it.

These are reflections to give pause; but the drain will continue, and British academics will continue to fly the narrowing divide of ocean hungry for new landscapes, unknown colleagues and fresher-faced acolytes. The great game of the jet-set academic will go on, and it has long since created its own literary form: Anglo-American novels by British academics like Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge, who have already used up some of the best titles in *Stepping Westward* and *Changing Places*. More air hostesses will ask ever more professors if their seat belts are securely fastened; they will place before them, with an air of detachment bordering on irresponsibility, more and more precooked dinners on specially moulded plastic trays and importune them with offers of duty-free liquors and cigarettes which they would be well advised to decline. The reasons for the new restlessness are several. Early retirement, sometimes on attractive terms, has rendered the British academic mobile. The collapse of socialist idealism among the intellectual classes has licensed him to suppress whatever inhibitions he may ever have felt—never very strong—against enriching himself in a capitalistic paradise. Middle age is a selfish state, when it becomes tempting to put behind one the daily anxieties of domestic policies, Ethiopian famines, the problem of the ozone layer and the developing ethnic crisis in Azerbaijan. Jet travel, meanwhile, gets cheaper, quicker, easier; research programs, many-headed and richly funded, may attract even the scholar with a taste for solitude from his lonely desk. And the first dry martini, gingerly tested on the virgin palate, can encourage a taste for another and another again.

And yet, and yet . . . As I gaze from my window, which is vine-clustered, I note across the trees and grass of the Cambridge Backs that the first shy daffodils are beginning to appear in an early spring—to be followed, if past years are to be believed, by the first shy Japanese tourists with necks entwined in camera straps; and the twigs of the trees are already sticky with the promise of new leaves. The subtle curve of the River Cam which, as I look, is crossed by two seventeenth-century stone bridges—one of them carved in relief, in the 1690s, with the Neptune-like figure of the river-god supported by a pile of books, like Milton's Camus—and the whole is picturesquely framed by willows and yews. And past my window, at 8:30 every morning except on Sundays, when they are an hour late, and again at dusk, comes a file of some twenty choirboys in black cloaks, scarlet collars and mortarboards, two by two, on their way from choir school to the Gothic chapel of the college, founded by the mother of the first Tudor monarch, where in bright treble voices they will sing their praises to another God. Just beyond the river curve stands the classic

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mass of Trinity College library, designed over three hundred years ago by Sir Christopher Wren—an Oxford man, it is said, who was yet allowed certain employments in Cambridge to erect edifices of exceptional note, and who designed his first building, the chapel of Pembroke College, for this very place.

The weather, never freezing by day and already mild, will soon be warm, and by the summer the Japanese businessman will be succeeded by the American professor—not to mention the French, German and Italian professor—avid for books and manuscripts in college libraries, for room-temperature beer in pubs by the river, for Indian curries, for theatre and music, for antiques and drives through country villages to gape at medieval parish churches. I am told there is still something in my bank account; and though experience tells me I can do without pubs, it also tells me I cannot do without irony. California can wait.

GEORGE WATSON

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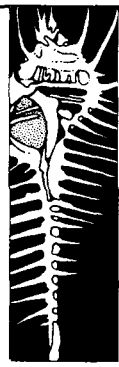

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Lives and Works

> Cattes have nine lives, poets but two—
> The lives they live, the workes they doe.
> —Anon. 17th century

Recent years have seen the publication of lengthy biographies of several major poets—Pope, Shelley, Eliot, Pound.[1] These all share a curious inability to come to grips with the poetry itself and fail to take full account of the mystery that divides a poet's work from his life—that makes for another life within and beyond a poet's historic span. There is some sagacity in the way Dr. Johnson in his *Lives of the English Poets* reserves his critical account of the poems to the end of each individual life. However partial or cruelly stringent he may be concerning Milton the man, he stands awed before *Paradise Lost*.

Our own way, which can indeed be both relevant and convenient, is to punctuate the life with the poems. The result of this is sometimes to explain away that which was unique and has remained so in a given work. Pound, who has often written badly, gives a ready excuse for this kind of thing, and one can sense Humphrey Carpenter's difficulty in believing such a desperately foolish man to be capable of the awesome in poetry. Even when, as I shall show, he had once thought highly of the "Pull down thy vanity" passage in Canto LXXXI, he cannot ultimately believe that the lines are unaffected by Pound's foolishness and uses them as evidence of the attempt to hide behind yet another mask.

It is very surprising to find people who do not habitually read twentieth-century poetry—and certainly not the poetry of Pound—taking enormous pleasure in books like Peter Ackroyd's *T.S. Eliot* and in Carpenter's volume, suddenly finding

[1] A SERIOUS CHARACTER: The Life of Ezra Pound, by *Humphrey Carpenter*. Houghton Mifflin. $40.00.

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themselves capable of pronouncing on these "cases" and deeming the treatment of them by their authors just and illuminating. And the poetry? That is shunted to one side of things, or glanced at across the phalanx of interesting facts, safely disabled. John Aubrey (1626–97), the author of those famous *Brief Lives*, realized that, except for such strange fellows as himself who wrote them down, many private facts would be forgotten, depriving us of the vicarious pleasure of sharing the existence of other people. Of late the facts have become so plentiful and research so "professional," they give us an illusion of omniscience. Maynard Mack's *Alexander Pope* runs to nine hundred and seventy-five pages, Carpenter tops a thousand. Brief lives are a thing of the past.

There are, no doubt, as many kinds of literary biographer as there are men and women, but they seem to divide themselves into two main types—the hagiographers and the realists. The hagiographers have been having a thin time of it recently. The best of them was Izaak Walton whose seventeenth-century lives of Herbert and Donne still make appealing reading. His younger contemporary, Aubrey—both a collector of country superstitions and a member of the Royal Society—already saw how persuasive fact (or what passes for fact) can be, and his realism betrays a taste for the ironic and the scandalous. Realism, as Carpenter shows, can place the biographer's subject in a fairly poor light—something that the sheer amassing of facts during the recent biography boom seems to emphasize, often putting the biographer into a position of supercilious detachment vis à vis his—perhaps victim would not be too strong a word. The greatest of the realists was Johnson. He was conscious that there are things either difficult or impossible to know. What he did know sometimes issued in moral discriminations of a tragic grandeur, as in his life of the poet Savage, or, as in his life of Milton and despite his awe at *Paradise Lost*, in caustic severity: "It appears, in all his writings, that he had the usual concomitant of great abilities, a lofty and steady confidence in himself, perhaps not without some contempt of others; for scarcely any man ever wrote so much and praised so few."

When Walton wrote his "Life of Herbert" (1670) he saw the poet's marriage to Jane Danvers as an idyll in which "there never was any opposition betwixt them, unless it were a Contest which should most incline to a compliance with the others desires." John Aubrey, who was cousin to Jane Danvers, writes

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more drily and is less generous: "He married Jane, the third daughter of Charles Danvers, of Bayntun, in com. Wilts, Esq, but had no issue by her. He was a very fine complexion and consumptive. His mariage, I suppose, hastened his death. My kinswoman was a handsome *bona roba* and ingeniose."

Of that splendid poet, the Countess of Pembroke, who completed the metrical psalter begun by her deceased brother Sir Philip Sydney, we learn from Aubrey: "She was very salacious, and she had a Contrivance that in the Spring of the yeare, when the Stallions were to leape the Mares, they were to be brought before such a part of the house, where she had a *vidette* (a hole to peepe out at) to looke on them and please herselfe with their Sport; and then she would act the like sport herselfe with *her* stallions." Something similar was related of the young Lucrezia Borgia, so are we in the world of fact or fancy, realism or sheer fabrication? Aubrey could do a good deal elsewhere with tone and innuendo, as can our modern biographers, Carpenter among them. Neither is the Tory Johnson guiltless in this respect, frequently taking from his sources the "facts" that were most injurious to the republican Milton. His disapproval of Milton's character was a principled one, however, although its expression was not: you certainly don't feel that Johnson would perform the embarrassing volte-face that mark the earlier stages of Carpenter's work on Pound.

Four years previous to the publication of *A Serious Character* ("about two thirds of the way through my research on Pound"), Carpenter gave a lecture at the Royal Society of Literature in London entitled "The Madness of Ezra Pound." This provides us with a unique piece of evidence about the genesis of a modern biography and the almost arbitrary sense of what constituted facts for Carpenter, as he attempted to understand another elusive human being. At that point in time, his aim seems to have been to trace the madness as far back in Pound's life as possible: "After . . . some months of work . . . the first thing that struck me about Pound was the almost total absence of a childhood." No evidence to support this is adduced, but, as we are told later, "Pound's childhood emerges at last from the shadows, and, from the very few facts we know about it, it becomes possible at least to make an intelligent guess at how the extraordinary personality we know as Ezra Pound developed from the small son of Homer and Isabel . . ." We clearly need

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more than any single intelligent guess and, as the lecture proceeds, we get several.

The lecture and the postscript which accompanied it in the 1986 volume of transactions of the society leave one uneasy, however, about the trustworthiness of Carpenter's guesses. He is, to a point, fairly ingenuous in letting us know of his own early theory that Pound was "a curious case of manic depression in which the mania lasted some thirty years or more, and was then followed by a ten-year depression." Carpenter put this idea to the psychiatrist Anthony Storr, also sending him *ABC of Economics*, some of Pound's letters from the 1930s "and other samples of prose." Apparently he sent no poetry and we have no evidence that Storr knew the poetry or thought it necessary to weigh that too. He was not, though, convinced by Carpenter's psychological hypothesis, but his own conclusions have a sketchiness that does not invite much confidence either: "I imagine that he was always regarded as 'odd' long before he was thought of as 'mad' . . . I am pretty sure he was 'schizoid'." Storr's diagnosis impressed Carpenter who went on to do a bit more amateur psychologizing ("speculation . . . [that] must be treated with extreme caution"). The speculation takes Pound's hypothetical schizophrenia back to his school days—"certainly the young Ezra, . . . keeping aloof from his classmates and displaying one gathers a precious vocabulary and other evidence of mental agility without ever forming close bonds of friendship, all this would seem to suggest a schizoid personality in formation . . ." Isn't the accusation here horribly close to what any philistine would say of any unusually bright and therefore "isolated" child? What a world of calloused preconception and vagueness appears in a phrase like "displaying one gathers a precious vocabulary." Might not that be a promise of exceptional liveliness in a pre-adolescent?

To be fair to Carpenter, he does not stay very long with this morsel he has left us to chew on. It is sandwiched, however, between two other slices of speculation. The top slice is poor quality supermarket bread: the Oedipus complex, Carpenter opines, is out, "yet," Pound was "one guesses, kept strikingly short of love"—one guesses?—and "Is it fanciful to suspect . . . he was deprived of that close bond between mother and child that seems vital to the development of an integrated personality?" It *is* fanciful, and we are not given evidence that would

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allow us to ponder the matter—only the half-hearted warning about "extreme caution." The bottom slice of the sandwich comes from a different supermarket, but it is just as woolly: the argument concerns those masks Pound kept putting on in his poems, "impersonating such characters as the troubadour poets, François Villon and . . . Bertran de Born. Later he adopted more subtle masks keeping them on for longer—the imitations of Chinese poets . . ., of Sextus Propertius, and the decadent dilettante Hugh Selwyn Mauberley." Only someone in a great hurry to get things said could let slip the idea that Villon was one of the troubadours. Carpenter cannot see there is a world of difference between speaking through the mask of, and identifying oneself with Propertius, and what Pound does with Mauberley who is a purely artistic creation and anyway consciously differentiated from Pound in the poem. How could Pound set about *imitating* his own invention? And whether keeping on those later masks "for longer" is a good or a bad thing we are not told.

For Carpenter is still in a hurry: "If I had two hours more at my disposal, I would go on now to examine the facts of Pound's early life and show that . . . all his bravura, his panache when confronting pre-1914 literary London, was a 'front' for a withdrawn, secretive individual . . ." A last literary example is thrown in to gloss this, "On His Own Face in a Glass." Of this innocent and insubstantial little poem from Pound's earliest phase ("O strange face there in the glass / O ribald company, O saintly host! / O sorrow-swept my fool, / What answer . . .") Carpenter concludes: "certainly he seems to be diagnosing his own madness." Certainly? Carpenter appears to know neither what a diagnosis is nor a poem. But, wait!—there is that postscript added a couple of months later, and to this I now turn.

In the postscript the "almost total absence of a childhood" is retracted: Carpenter's researches have turned up "a great deal of his unpublished correspondence, and in particular his letters to his parents beginning in childhood." Pound is now restored to a normal and healthy relationship with both parents. As for that "precious vocabulary"—the letters "show him to have been a very ordinary schoolboy, more interested in outdoor games than work or books." Carpenter admits that biographers "should be stopped from theorising before they have done all their homework" and he takes back or tones down several

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things he had said. At the same time, he wants to go on re-diagnosing: in the lecture the "Pull down thy vanity" passage from *The Pisan Cantos* was placed firmly alongside Pound's "great achievements . . . quite untarnished by this diagnosis of their creator." At which stage "this diagnosis" had meant the pieces fitting "with at times an almost chilling accuracy" to show that Pound's madness was continuous with the front he had put on to face "pre-war literary London." In the postscript to the lecture "Pull down thy vanity" is far from untarnished: "this famous passage . . . will appear, if examined closely, to be in itself another mask or pose." This change of opinion is less startling and less damaging than a new guess which is aimed at keeping Pound psychologically on the hop. Perhaps the Oedipus complex is admissable after all? Or, rather, when Pound told the psychiatrists at St. Elizabeths that he was "far removed from the Oedipus complex" and that they were on the wrong track in asking about that, Carpenter thinks Pound's claim was "sleight of hand. His letters to his mother show he was deeply attached to her and to some extent identified with her." Carpenter does not take this very far, but latches on to it another guess or diagnosis. Note the word "too" in this, for its use is prophetic of the way that, in the full-scale biography, Carpenter's syntax can cast aspersion and point beyond what is provable or probable: "There are certain homosexual traits, too—his attachment to Gaudier-Brezska, Wyndham Lewis, and others whom he promoted." This large claim is conveniently forgotten in the biography itself—evidently no more provable than the hint of mother-fixation in that sly little word "too." My sense of the book is that, for all his industrious gathering of information, Carpenter was highly suspicious of Pound before he began to write his life and, long before he had finished it, was heartily sick of him. It is surprising how early in *A Serious Character* the impatience shows itself or is thinly disguised by a playful and condescending sarcasm.

Readers of Charles Norman's *Ezra Pound* (1960) or of Noel Stock's *The Life of Ezra Pound* of ten years later, will, of course, find much that is new to them in Carpenter's pages. The general shape of Pound's life is familiar to most people with an interest in poetry, but they will come across fresh connections and original research—the trial and Pound's life at St. Elizabeths Hospital are cases in point—which is valuable, if a little

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protracted in the telling. I found Johnson's "Life of Milton" running in my head both for parallels and for contrast. The chief contrast is Johnson's compactness and also his sharply discriminatory account of the poems along with the irremovable consciousness that *Paradise Lost* is a poem that transcends and cannot be reduced to the terms of the life of a man whom he does not altogether like: "I am now to examine . . . a poem, which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance the second, among the productions of mankind."

Like Johnson, Carpenter is confronted by a man for whom he seems to feel no particular affection (despite the obligatory words on Pound's generosity to others) and of whose attitude to women he is deeply and perhaps justly critical. Johnson speaks of Milton's "Turkish contempt of females as subordinate and inferior beings" and that sometimes fits Pound in his more blatantly phallocentric moods. Both biographers disapprove of their subject's politics which, in each case, led to an adulation of the strong man—though Cromwell might be felt to be a superior choice to that of the vain and capricious Mussolini. Johnson complains of the "violence of invective" in Milton's pamphleteering and his adoption, against the grain of his character and education, of "the puritanical savageness of manners." Pound's pamphleteering style could be both buoyant and amusing, but by the time of *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* it is running out of grist, and by the time of the Rome broadcasts "puritanical savageness" would hardly do justice to the crudeness of tone in some of them. Both poets devoted themselves to composing an epic of universal scope, but if Milton's "with respect to design, may claim the first place," Pound's design is not always easy to discern and finally falls apart into fragments—among these, some of the most beautiful stretches of the poem which Carpenter is in too much of a hurry to look at in any detail. I have already spoken of his impatience and, insofar as it relates directly to Pound's own character, one cannot but feel that it damages the apparent scrupulosity in the large-scale amassing of biographical facts, perhaps more subtly and covertly than Johnson's Tory unforgivingness in the case of Milton.

With a thousand pages at one's disposal, it is not difficult to be certain that one's aspersions will take. All seems well with the

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evocation of clapboard Hailey, Idaho, of Pound's forebears and the early years of "the infant Gargantua." Even the chapter "Suburban Prejudice" (the phrase is an ominous borrowing from Pound's castigation of his own anti-Semitism) tells us something valuable about American middle-class attitudes to the influx of Italians and Jews. But having shown us that world in some detail, Carpenter cannot forego the ungenerous conclusion that Pound's "promotion of other writers and artists, invaluable as its results sometimes were, smacked a little of the small-town showman—the huckster peddling his toothache pills or giving demonstrations of 'magnetic healing'." There speaks the voice of small-town Oxford that once "buried E.P." ("born / In a half-savage country out of date") in the first section of *Mauberley*. We are to hear it again and again in the chapters that follow.

If you cannot show the child and the adolescent as potentially schizoid any longer, you can see he is not to be trusted by the company he keeps: "Ra [Pound's name in the family] liked the company of the muscular" (a bit of hindsight, presumably, from the Mussolini period). Part of the evidence for this is a photograph of Pound at the Wyncote Public School next to "Jimmy Luskin, son of a local grocer, a tall lout with a shifty expression." I have gazed long at the photograph without being able to detect that Luskin is a lout or that his rather intent gaze is expressive of shiftiness. Carpenter's remark is of a piece with his later interpretation of another photograph, that of Ford Madox Ford: "As usual, Ford seems to be doing all the talking." Anyone with half an eye would know from other photographs of Ford that he had the unfortunate type of mouth that appeared always to be dropping agape. Whether words were coming from it is another question. Carpenter deprecatingly says Ford "claimed" to be related to the Rossettis. Ford *was* related to the Rossettis, his mother's sister having married William Michael Rossetti. It would be tedious to make an inventory of half of Carpenter's condescensions and aspersions. They seem to be a habit of mind, one hardly to be welcomed in a professional biographer however informative he may be—and Carpenter is certainly that.

Yet something must be said of his handling of the emerging poet, for even here the unreliability of interpretation that appeared in "The Madness of Ezra Pound," makes itself felt,

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and Carpenter will go on to interpret the mature poems with a similar uncertainty of touch as he moves back and forth between the life and the works. The poems that Pound wrote to H.D. in his twentieth year are, if you like, "stale creampuffs," as he himself said later, yet for all that aren't they rather remarkable for a boy from Wyncote in 1905? This early appropriation of medieval love conventions may strike us as naive, but you cannot take their full value by quoting William Carlos Williams' truly suburban remark of some forty years later: "If he ever got under a gal's skirts it must have been mainly with his imagination." It was easier to write poems to Hilda Doolittle as "Is-Hilda," Carpenter tells us, "than to say, even to himself, what he really thought about her." Clearly the young man thought that a Pennsylvania girl was up to the Iseult of myth any day. What is wrong about these poems for Carpenter is that they "talk to Hilda . . . as a source of enlightenment and secret knowledge, as if she were some figure in a Gnostic heresy of the early Church rather than a real girl he had kissed in a tree-house." Yet isn't this something to be marvelled at rather than derided? To put the matter crudely: before the age of universal contraception and easy lays, wasn't there a certain wisdom in Pound's youthful sublimation of sexual desire and his identification of those energies with a possible enlightenment even though sublimated, their lambency playing round the image of "a real girl" transported beyond herself? This "Platonic" habit of mind never left Pound and it is a way of thinking that dominates the envoy in *Mauberley*, where behind the "real singer" is seen the Muse figure of English song, and it governs also the appearance of Venus in *The Pisan Cantos*.

When, after having taken us on a pedestrian tour of some of the major poems, Carpenter reaches those Cantos, his critical skills have by no means sharpened. His third look at the "Pull down thy vanity" section is leisurely and "learned," dissipating the force of the poetry with pointless and pseudo-judicious asides: "The lines . . . which speak of 'a swollen magpie . . . Half black half white', have sometimes been thought to refer to Ezra's captors, the US Army, with its mixed races, but all the evidence of the Pisan Cantos [note the non sequitur ushered in by that 'but'] is that he liked and was amused by the black inmates of the DTC." The passage now seems to fail for Carpenter because Pound does not reproach himself suffi-

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ciently "for his intentions, his choice of ideology." The later Pound, hard on himself if ever a man was, is given little credit for the damning reappraisal of his own life and work. When, by the time he is living at his daughter's castle near Merano, the poet goes out in stormy weather and catches cold, Carpenter is swift to quip, "There was no rôle left but to play King Lear." The late poetry, from *Rock-Drill* on, is mentioned but not examined. The remarkable poetic achievement of *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* gets passed over in silence, as does *Women of Trachis*—conceivably because these are "translations."

Perhaps all biographers of poets should set to work by first asking themselves, "What is a poet?" The text they ought to learn by heart, or take out and reread from time to time—whenever, that is, they feel in danger of the facts of the historical life contaminating their sense of what is great in the work—should be Wordsworth's "Preface":

> Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, "that he looks before and after." He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and of manners, of laws and customs: in spite of many things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time.

There is not a word of this that does not apply to Pound at his finest—and that might not be used also as a measure of his poetic failures. Wordsworth's Poet may seem too august a figure for our meanly deconstructive time. Yet here is a more than human figure whose imaginable possibility gives to the "real" man an added reality, one in which his reading of others—of Cavalcanti, Li Po, Ben Jonson (say)—together with his own writings, outdistance his daily self, thus making of poetry, in Aristotle's formulation, a more philosophical enquiry than history.

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HAROLD FROMM

Holroyd/Strachey/Shaw: Art and Archives in Literary Biography

Biographies are written for an age, rather than for all time, particularly in the present age, which does not believe in "all time." What constitutes "the facts" of a life is generally far from clear-cut, and principles of interpretation that seemed brilliant when they were first employed have a way of seeming ridiculous a few decades later. Given this nature of things, few biographies survive as classics, since their facts and their explanatory principles inevitably do them in. In the end, an amorphous quality that we conveniently call "literary merit" is what finally keeps a handful of biographies alive.

Both the facts of the "real" world and their possible interpretations for the literary world have changed so greatly since the biographies of Bernard Shaw in the forties and fifties that the first volume of Michael Holroyd's "life" has been long-awaited and eagerly anticipated. Since St John Ervine produced his account in 1956, just a few years after Shaw's death, anything has seemed possible—and as far as lifewriting is concerned, much of that "anything" can be attributed to Holroyd himself. Although he had produced a critical biography of the relatively unknown writer, Hugh Kingsmill, in 1964, as well as a later biography of the painter, Augustus John, in 1974–75, it was with the appearance of his *Lytton Strachey* in 1967–68 that Holroyd was catapulted into the fame he now enjoys, prompting this look into its origins.

First published in two volumes which divided the life chronologically, Holroyd's biography of Strachey was reissued in 1971 in a revised, corrected, and updated version that separated the critical and biographical chapters into two new volumes, a judicious decision that enabled the life to be nar-

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rated without interruptions by the long, detailed examinations of the writings. In the Penguin edition that I have used, volume one is called *Lytton Strachey: A Biography* and occupies 1078 pages of text, excluding the index. The second volume, *Lytton Strachey and the Bloomsbury Group: His Work, Their Influence*, fills 374 pages of text.[1] It is perhaps an understatement to describe this as quite a dose, prompting one to ask: Apart from the excitement produced at the time by Holroyd's candid accounts of the "amatory gyrations" (to quote Leonard Woolf) of Strachey's circle, was it worth it?

In the revised edition, Holroyd provides a compelling new preface that relates the story of his remarkable discovery of unpublished materials at the home of Strachey's younger brother, James—the English translator of Freud—where he spent five years sifting through perhaps thirty thousand letters, not only Strachey's, "preserved since the age of six, [but] the letters from his friends, many of them internationally famous as painters, philosophers, novelists and economists." As the massive list of acknowledgments also reveals, Holroyd traveled widely in order to visit other collections as well as to interview a large number of survivors of both Strachey's circle and his more casual acquaintances. The result is the sort of registration of a life that has hardly appeared since Boswell, with whom, indeed, it would not be stretching things to make a comparison. For here are the copious letters and memoirs of a large group of interlocking men and women whose actions and reactions have been minutely recorded and preserved, affording a density and continuity of record with few equals. Although a certain amount of pruning might have been advisable, especially in the earlier, more adolescent years, most of this material is of superior interest.

Given the fact that by far the major part of these documents was and is unpublished, Holroyd wisely avoided using the cumbersome machinery of bibliographic references: we are

[1] Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography. Volume I: The Unknown Years, 1880–1910; Volume II: The Years of Achievement, 1910–1932*. London: Wm. Heinemann Ltd., 1967, 1968. These volumes were also published in the USA by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. The Penguin edition, retitled as described in my text, was published by Penguin Books in England, the USA, and Australia in 1971. All my references to this biography are to the first volume of the Penguin edition.

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furnished simply with explanatory footnotes to identify people who appear in the course of the narrative, while the bibliography at the end alludes only to the published sources. Speaking of Strachey's letters and diaries, Holroyd remarks that "in places I have tried to use his own phrases, sentence rhythms and other stylistic qualities to show how and where the connection between the life and the work are [*sic*] especially close."[2] It is important to grasp exactly what this means, because the matter comes up once again in connection with the life of Bernard Shaw. In addition to extensive quotations from the letters of Strachey and his friends, it becomes increasingly apparent as one gets to know Strachey's voice that a very great deal of the Holroydian narration is being conducted in that same voice, and since one has no access to the unpublished sources (which in any case are not specifically identified), one must assume that not only paraphrases but verbatim quotes are woven into this narrative substrate. The effect, however, is stunning—and for long stretches the reader has a sense of being steeped in Strachey's innermost psyche even though it is Holroyd who is speaking, speaking—one might say—by means of the narrative voice of an Omniscient Biographer. And yet, most remarkably, the narrator seems at one and the same time not only cool, exterior, controlled, and unflappable, but warmly sympathetic, interior, and deeply involved, almost sharing (as it were) his subject's vital juices. He seems at once a Flaubertian/Joycean god, not above critical or even satirical observations, paring his disinterested fingernails behind the arras, and a partaker of the feelings and fixations of his characters as though they were his very own.

Strachey's life was driven by an almost single-minded obsession with love, sex, and art. From the endless flirtations and relationships with other young men at Cambridge to his long-term loves of Duncan Grant, Ralph Partridge, and Roger Senhouse, Strachey sought—through physicality and dependence—the type of fulfillment that only transcendence can

[2] Elsewhere, Holroyd remarks: "One of my own biographical devices has been to use, here and there, my subjects' techniques, attitudes, vocabulary, tricks and manners: and, short of parody, apply them back." See "Literary and Historical Biography," in *New Directions in Biography* (A Biography Monograph, Published for the Biographical Research Center by The University Press of Hawaii, 1981), p. 14.

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afford. Although greater and greater intimacy seems to promise a final access to total satisfaction, nothing on earth could ever really provide it, and one comes to feel that the Platonic Ladder of Love was invented more than two millennia ago in order to handle this very problem, however dismal its failure. Strachey's ongoing ménage à trois with Dora Carrington and Ralph Partridge is a study in human inter-attachment of a kind that has rarely been documented, each loving the others with a different type of consuming and half-demented passion. Carrington's ultimate and inevitable suicide soon after Strachey's death provides the final seal on a devotion beyond the merely mundane. Holroyd's characterization of her love, like most of his writing throughout, is masterful in the extreme—and when this skill is multiplied by almost 1500 pages, the quality of his performance can only be described as astounding:

> Yet with all her fears and uncertainties, it was a good life she enjoyed with him, materially and otherwise. She travelled widely and met many people. Towards Lytton's young men she felt no jealousy, and since they adored her, she basked in their playful attentions. These years at Tidmarsh were probably the happiest in both their lives. For her happiness was Lytton's happiness, and all her energies were orientated towards what they both wanted. She was certain, too, that though he might feel little sexual desire for her, yet she would be closer to him, and better for him, than anyone else could be. Never again would he be enfeebled by unnecessary illness or prostrated by secret misery and depleted vigour. She would see to it that he led a regular life supported at every turn by glasses of warm milk, reviving country walks, measured doses of quinine, Bemax and Sanatogen, and sensible clothes, and Extract of Malt, and Dr Gregory's rhubarb powder, and eucalyptus oil and all the other wholesome syrups, nourishing foods and cunning medicaments the world had to offer.

On the face of things, one would strongly doubt that much could be made of a relatively minor writer like Strachey, perpetually invalided, for years involved in scatterbrained and histrionic adolescent crushes, constantly pouring himself out in letters full of gossip, malice, trivia, and producing a somewhat limited body of work. Yet these often wonderful letters (not to mention the vital, eccentrically spelled and punctuated letters of Dora Carrington) provide a rare documentation of the transitory, as well as the deepest, feelings of an individual

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psyche whose growth, development, and enrichment are foregrounded by the biographer's synthesizing skills. Holroyd's artistry in mastering this immense cache of materials and weaving them into a story that appears seamless and continuous even while (without notes yet as unobtrusively as possible) it identifies dates and correspondents, is immeasurably enhanced by his freely offered opinions, his completely involved—yet independent—point of view, his characterizations that attempt to explain personality and motivation while avoiding cheap psychologizing and Freudian mechanism. Of Strachey in his youth he remarks, "Ironically, in his eagerness to attain a satisfactory companionship of mind and emotion, he would frequently act as his mother did towards himself—and with similar results. For he lavished on his most esteemed friends such a passionate intensity of adoration as to infect them with a feeling of guilt and inadequacy, even embarrassment, so that they shied away from his suffocating, alternately maternal and filial attentions." Of his relationship with D. H. Lawrence, he writes: "Lawrence's and Lytton's mutual aversion seems to have been aggravated by their many points of apparent similarity. With their reddish beards and their puny bodies, their crippling physical infirmities, their irritated contempt for ordinary men and women and intense internal envy of those vaulted up into high positions, their love of traveling—of 'moving on'—and their years of struggle to disburden themselves from the very different but pervasive influence of their mothers, each one seemed to stand as a painful caricature of the other's least admirable qualities." Passages like these, in steering clear of trendy or obsolescent explanatory schemata, do not yet seem dated despite the lapse of twenty years and are very unlikely to seem so within the next twenty. And because of the fluency and discursiveness of the prose, with its thorough assimilation of massive materials into the very fibers of the sentences, this biography almost never threatens to turn into a chronicle or history, depending as they do on an unconvincing thread of mere chronology. Furthermore, Holroyd's prose, even after 1500 pages, functions like an almost transparent medium, betraying unusually few tics or irritating mannerisms, the absence of which contributes to the effect of omniscience that permeates the narrative. (Doubtless, a computer concordance

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would reveal mannerisms, but a reader is not a computer.) Speaking of Carrington's resistance to Ralph Partridge's overtures of marriage, Holroyd writes: "But despite all her opposition, Ralph was amazingly persistent, and Carrington began to fear that her own stubbornness might soon alienate Lytton, ruining their life at Pangbourne together, which she loved so much. He had said nothing, of course. She would not expect him to. But she sensed his growing disapproval of their fractious relations. As Ralph's exasperation mounted, so, in proportion, did her own anxiety." This is the most supple and varied of prose, its rhythms entrancing, its surprises—like "which she loved so much" and "fractious"—disarming.

Although this biography presents a public Strachey and a private Strachey who are sufficiently different to require synthesizing, as well as a man and an artist who convey a somewhat different tone of being, it is notably successful in displaying the connections between the two. This leaves the reader with a sense that he has actually made contact with the centrality of the biographical subject, a rare achievement, though admittedly the nature of the available materials is crucial—and Holroyd struck pay dirt in this regard. Remarkably enough, what starts out looking like the eccentric utterances of an individuality too extreme to connect with the rest of the world, emerges through Holroyd's skills as the kind of atypical typicality associated with classical art forms that address the generic human race in all of its schizophrenic irreconcilabilities.

Holroyd's review of Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia Woolf (reprinted in *Unreceived Opinions*) gives us some insight into the aims of his art. "Literary biography," he remarks, "is an opportunity for the subject to write, in collaboration [with the biographer], a posthumous work,"[3] a claim that he repeats in the Shaw book and which is surely borne out in his account of Strachey, where Holroyd is both within and without, ventriloquist and critic at the same time. Although he has much praise for Bell's book, he finds it unsuccessful in presenting the inside view: "In Quentin Bell's biography . . . we see something of what it was like looking at her, less of what it was like for her

[3] Michael Holroyd, *Unreceived Opinions* (New York, 1974), p. 217.

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looking at us. . . . We do hear her voice in this biography, but it is distant. For we have the letter of the truth rather than its spirit, the duty not the joy." And most tellingly, Holroyd concludes: "To have plumbed her inner life of emotion and thought . . ., he would have had to take a step on his own initiative; to present what Virginia herself called 'that queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow,' he would have had to evolve a biography as daring and difficult as one of her own novels. As it is, she has slipped through his fingers, and he has given us, faultlessly, the expected not the real thing." Beyond any doubt, insofar as biography can do it at all, of Strachey he has given us the daring and difficult real thing.

Although there was considerable hubbub about *Lytton Strachey* when it appeared twenty years ago, the reviews, if my sampling is representative, were hardly enthusiastic. Leon Edel, for example, remarked that "to write the life of the sedentary, often ailing Strachey, whose art was lucid and brief, as if he had been a great prime minister or a Lord Byron of homosexuality does raise serious questions, and precisely about 'selection, detachment, design [Strachey's own requirements for biography].' " And he adds that it is the "mass of material that is at once undiscriminating and suffocating," including "every boy Strachey ever winked at."[4] Calvin Bedient found it "soggy with detail, heavy with observation, pallid and unshapely" and commented on "the sheer awfulness of the writing."[5] Even Leonard Woolf found it "heavy handed and heavy minded," complaining not only of its "inordinate length" but its "misreading of Lytton's character," which he finds Holroyd taking much too seriously.[6] But Noel Annan's powerfully authoritative review for the *New York Review of Books* alluded to "a mountain of material nearly all of which is fascinating" and he praised Holroyd for his "skill and integrity," though he too felt pruning was in order, as well as a bit more contextualization of the letters.[7]

[4] *Saturday Review*, 51 (April 27, 1968), p. 32.
[5] *The Nation*, 206 (May 20, 1968), p. 670.
[6] *The New Statesman*, 74 (October 6, 1967), p. 438.
[7] *The New York Review of Books*, 10 (June 6, 1968), p. 8.

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Although, as I have said, some of the repetitious, play-acting, amatory letters could well have been left out, the density of the material as experienced twenty years later seems one of the biography's greatest strengths, especially since the lengthy critical chapters have been removed to another volume. That such density can be dangerous even for Holroyd, however, is evident in his surprisingly tedious biography of Augustus John.[8] Nevertheless, apart from occasional overwriting, complaints about Holroyd's prose now require reinterpretation. The most interesting question is why, despite the impact that *Lytton Strachey* originally made because of its extraordinary documentation and, *for then*, sensational sexual candor, so much of the response should have been negative. Twenty years later the reasons do not seem far to seek: for aside from the evident massiveness of the biographical materials, in itself overwhelming, the detailed recording of sexual feelings in 1967 came as an immense and discomfiting surprise *in the concrete* (as opposed to *theoretical* open-mindedness), even though the "sexual revolution" was well underway. And when the candid sexuality turned out to be homosexuality, the body blow was that much more breathtaking, even though (or more likely *because*) Holroyd treated it in the most matter-of-fact way possible. Yet twenty years later the sexualized biography has become such a commonplace that one is now surprised at the absence of any really *explicit* physicality in the Strachey book, the sexuality of which consists mostly of raptures. How vastly things have changed! Since the late sixties we have had sexualized or homosexualized accounts of everyone from Willa Cather to Paul Tillich, W. H. Auden to John F. Kennedy. In these twenty years, to cite just one example, Leon Edel has moved from uneasiness about Strachey to new "candor" about Henry James in his recent one-volume abridgement of the life. "We are [now] able to offer," he remarks in his new introduc-

[8] Holroyd himself comments on this matter: "The length of a biography does not reflect the importance of its subject (a ludicrous though popular notion): it reflects the interest of the material available and the effect that material has produced on the mind and feelings of the biographer." "Literary and Historical Biography," p. 22. Unfortunately, despite its skill, this 1975 biography of Augustus John provides a good example of the ways in which the quality of the archives limits the quality of the art. Though less than 600 pages, it is probably twice as long as it ought to have been.

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tion, "a more forthright record of personal relations, of deeper emotions and sexual fantasies, and need no longer wrap indiscretions and adulteries in Victorian gauze."[9]

Thus, Holroyd's *Lytton Strachey*—revised and resituated—is not the same phenomenon it used to be. Now, far from sounding "awful," its prose reads like the language of Lyrical Biography: a Wagnerian onslaught of erogenous psychological details fusing teller and told in a *Tristan*-like ocean of affect and power. In its compatibility of form with content, Holroyd's book is a work of literary genius.

And now, in contrast to the somewhat ambivalent nose-holdings of the late sixties, Holroyd's life of Shaw is being hailed as a biographical masterpiece, an accomplishment *extraordinaire*, a lesson of the master. From the glitzy histrionics of the review for *Time* (describing a book I couldn't quite recall having read) to the more controlled but generally enthusiastic reviews in the big journals, the approval has been euphoric. Yet, as is so often the case, almost none of the reviews I have seen has much to say about the biography itself: after some vague and woolly praise, the subject is changed invariably to Shaw and often to sex. What begs to be addressed, however, is whether a performance of the caliber of the Strachey biography can be surpassed or even equaled by its author. And this time the stakes are much higher: a genuinely major literary figure about whom numerous biographies have already been written.

"I was invited to write this biography in the early 1970s," Holroyd reports in his acknowledgements for *Bernard Shaw: The Search for Love*. "The most recent Shaw biographies, by St John Ervine, Archibald Henderson, Hesketh Pearson and Stephen Winsten, appeared in or before 1956, Shaw's centenary year." The Shaw Estate, he goes on to explain, "felt that the time was approaching for an assessment of his life and work to be made for a new generation of readers and *by a writer who had not known G.B.S. personally* [my emphasis]."[10] This was certainly a valid feeling on the part of the Shaw Estate, since Shaw's domination over his biographers—and over everyone else—

[9] Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life* (New York, 1985), p. *xii*.

[10] BERNARD SHAW, Volume I, 1856–1898: The Search for Love, by *Michael Holroyd*. Random House. $24.95.

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had been irresistible, as Hesketh Pearson made perhaps clearer than he intended in the acknowledgements of his readable and compact *Bernard Shaw* of 1942 (reissued in 1950 with no evidence of updating):

> My first thanks are due to Mr. Bernard Shaw, who has answered every question I have put to him, either verbally or by letter, has allowed me to quote his published and unpublished correspondence, and has given me much hitherto unavailable information about his own life. A great deal that could not have been made public before is here released by the parties having passed from life into history. *Whenever possible I have narrated what he has told me of his life and times in his own vivid phrases* [my emphasis]. On every doubtful point I have consulted him, and the reader may feel confident that all the facts in my book have been checked by the only living person who is in a position to do so.[11]

This authentication turned out to be a mixed blessing, for although Pearson's book could make some claim to a mind of its own, the takeover by GBS was great nonetheless. Shaw, after all, was a man who conducted interviews with himself for newspapers and magazines without letting on that what looked like a conversation was in reality a monologue. And Archibald Henderson's third (and monumental) biography of Shaw, *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century*, published in 1956, had its own problems:

> When, on February 24, 1903, I descended to eight o'clock breakfast at the Harcourt on 57th Street, South Park, Illinois, little did I dream that I was on the threshold of the greatest intellectual venture and spiritual adventure of my life. With the close of this day I was, all unconsciously, taking the first step toward becoming, in the near future, the biographer of a new immortal. Had I realized, at that moment, the daring of my aspiration and the magnitude of the undertaking, I should have shrunk back in alarm and perhaps discarded the most glorious biographical and critical opportunity of the era.[12]

These already daunting remarks are followed by 952 densely printed pages in a similar vein, so that for all its extraordinary

[11] Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw: His Life and Personality* (London, 1950), p. 13.

[12] Archibald Henderson, *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century* (New York, 1956), p. xiii.

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weight of achievement as a documentary (if certainly not a high-art) life, one can hardly imagine many people actually reading this gushing, mindbreaking book from cover to cover, so prolix and omnipresent is its author throughout. Though Henderson does not flinch from critical observations, it is nonetheless true that Shaw's prodigious presence hovers over every page, however much it may be upstaged by Henderson's unrelenting self-dramatizations. Contrary to this pattern, St John Ervine's 1956 biography, despite the author's intimacy with both GBS and his wife (it is dedicated to Charlotte Shaw), is an elegantly told and highly readable narrative, with a distinctive character of its own that admires while resisting GBS throughout:

> In reading G.B.S.'s diatribes against his schools and teachers, it is well to bear in mind that they were written in his middle manhood and old age, and may have been derived more from his theories about education than from his experience of it. He refers habitually to schools as if they were concentration camps or penitentiaries, and to masters as if they were brutal warders or sadistic commandants. In his account of his schools in *Sixteen Self-Sketches*, he says, 'At the Wesleyan I had never dreamt of learning my lessons, nor of telling the truth to that common enemy and executioner, the schoolmaster.'
>
> This fantastic tosh reads like the remark of a man so far removed from his boyhood by age and ideas that have long ceased to have any relevance to known facts that even his reminiscences have become romantic figments. To say this is not to deny that G.B.S. disliked formal education or what was considered to be formal education. It is merely to remind the reader that he probably attributed to Sonny Shaw, the nervous and sensitive boy who was starved of affection at home, the horror of schools which he had developed long after he had left them, which was, indeed, the result of his rebellion against society in general and the views he formed in the Fabian Society, though these were not views that the Webbs, for example, could ever have shared.[13]

Ervine's narrative, more than almost any other, relies on its own words and has its own courtly, gallant, now slightly anachronistic but still charming flavor, an old gentility struggling to fuse itself with modernity. Given Ervine's success at achieving

[13] St John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends* (London, 1956), pp. 30–31.

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not only a measure of autonomy but a resistance to Shaw's distinctive voice, the reader of Holroyd will be eager to learn whether the Shavian steamroller still rolls on apace, even though its driver has long since fallen off.

Bernard Shaw: The Search for Love begins life with its own particular liabilities, the most crushing of which Holroyd is determined to explain away. In an attempt to forestall criticism, he raises this very problem in a "Bibliographical Note" at the end: "Shaw himself was determined that his books should be easily accessible to the general reading public, and I have tried to follow this example. I have not added to the length or cost by appending a bibliography, since such a listing would merely repeat in part the excellent Soho Bibliography prepared by Dan H. Laurence and published at the Clarendon Press in 1983." Then, after listing some sources that were not published until after the Soho Bibliography, he alludes to Shaw's many "posthumous" appearances in print and the choice this seemed to present between "providing a list of sources that would (if I were to preserve consistency through the three volumes of this biography) be stupendously out of date, or of delaying publication beyond everyone's endurance including my own." He explains how he got around this difficulty:

> I have decided to print my sources separately after the publication of the third volume of my biography. To those Shavian scholars who feel they cannot 'use' my book until these sources are to hand I offer my apologies. But they will know that by not charging general readers for an apparatus they will never use I am acting very much in line with Shaw's own economic practice of making his work fall within the means of as many people as possible. I hope that when my source notes become available, they will appear in a form that is both easier to use and of more lasting use.

This explanation, so unconvincing in its solicitude for the pocketbook of the "general" reader (who is apt to sound a little feeble-minded) and its account of the flux of Shavian publications, was contested rather sharply by Bernard Crick (Orwell's biographer) and responded to, still unconvincingly, by Holroyd in a three-round altercation in *TLS*.[14]

[14] *The Times Literary Supplement*, issues of October 14, 21, and 28, 1988.

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The biography's second procedural problem is closely related to the first: Holroyd nowhere explains—as he explicitly does in connection with Strachey—how he intends to use his sources, especially letters and diaries. Will he make extensive and free use of paraphrase? Will he use verbatim quotations without any indication that he is doing so? Since this volume totally eschews documentation, since there is not even one single footnote, since people, places and things are either explained in the text itself or not explained at all, the reader has no way of finding out whether any given words are by Holroyd or by Shaw or by anybody, unless Holroyd happens to say so or use quotation marks.

With regard to the identification of quotes from Shaw, Holroyd usually has little to say in his text unless the source is particularly pertinent. Quotations can come from public documents like prefaces to plays, or private documents like letters and diary entries. Even worse, they can have been written in 1880 or in 1945. In dealing with Strachey, Holroyd almost always gave us the context of quotations as part of his general narrative, so the missing notes were not crucial, especially since the source materials were generally unavailable in any case. But here this is not consistently his practice, even though he must have realized that a large part of the meaning of any remark derives from its context. Is Shaw speaking to the world, to his lover, his mother, his diary? Is he speaking at age 18, 46, 73, 91, and as an obscure or a famous person? Without such information, many of the quotations are virtually unintelligible. For example, in a discussion of Shaw's relationships with women and the ways in which he harangued them, Holroyd writes, "However much he did lecture, urge, flatter and coax, he could not make the worlds of fantasy and actuality coalesce: 'Many vices appear seductive to me in imagination that in reality revolt me by their coarseness.' " It makes all the difference in the world whether Shaw was saying this to his mistress, Jenny Patterson, or his wife-to-be, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, or whether it is part of an autobiographical sketch addressed to no one in particular. And one of the many epigraphs that Holroyd uses to introduce sections of the book reads, "I shall never be able to begin a new play until I fall in love with somebody else." Is this a gallant remark to a new girlfriend or a parting shot to

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an old one—or neither? Just what does it mean? In the case of someone like GBS the problem of meaning is especially acute because Shaw was nothing if not rhetorical; and to understand a Shavian utterance we generally need to know something about the underlying programs of his rhetoric, programs not so much philological as psychological or philosophical.

The matter of paraphrase and quotation without quotation marks is even more complex and it would take a Stanley Weintraub to shake it all out. But apart from Shavian echoes, we sometimes come across a passage like this one about Shaw's career as a reporter and essayist for the *Pall Mall Gazette*: "He seemed to fill these columns from a magic well that never ran dry or lost its sparkle provided he pumped hard enough." In his preface to *Plays Unpleasant*, Shaw wrote: "In my weekly columns, which I once filled full from a magic well that never ran dry or lost its sparkle provided I pumped hard enough, I began to repeat myself. . . ."

Why, then, one might ask, should documentary techniques that worked so well for *Lytton Strachey* now serve as grounds for strong objection? The answer has to do with the radical differences between the circumstances of the two biographies. Lytton Strachey, for all his influence, remains a fairly minor writer whose works are not well-known; and the documents upon which Holroyd's biography was constructed are almost entirely unpublished, unfamiliar, and unavailable. Holroyd's use of letters and diaries was consistently chronological—it was generally clear at any given moment who wrote them and when; and if there was any doubt, he gave us explicit identifications. We always knew where we were in the ongoing story. And because the documents would never be generally available, Holroyd felt free to employ the daring technique of using Strachey's own words beyond the conventions of customary biographical quotation.

But the circumstances surrounding this new biography are entirely different. Bernard Shaw is one of the major British writers of the twentieth century. A majority of the sources upon which this biography depends (despite all its new material) have been previously published and many of them are generally known, some even being a part of common culture. With so many of the sources virtually public property, the act of faith

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that was a necessary part of the reading of *Lytton Strachey* cannot be expected or exacted from any but the most passive of readers. Any new biography of Shaw is inevitably a rearrangement of a good deal of such public property and attempts to resist that fact will only cause trouble. This is not meant to suggest that Holroyd has anything to conceal but that presenting us with notes and bibliography many years hence, when we are in fact reading this book *now* and want to deal with *and understand* it now, has an unavoidably obstructionist air.

Without notes, then, it is often impossible to be certain of the sense of Holroyd's narrative, because of the way in which he uses the multitudinous works of Shaw irrespective of their genres, dates, or addressees, as if they had all been written in an eternal present for the same audience. And if he sometimes uses Shaw's own words without acknowledgement or quotation marks, the effect can be eerie because we *have* heard many of them before.

Although we can infer—from the immense list of acknowledgements as well as the brief list of books published since the Soho Bibliography of 1983—that Holroyd has built his biography from a good deal of new material as well as the familiar old material, what we cannot find out with any certainty is the nature and extent of what is unpublished. By putting a few pieces together, however, we can at least determine that two of the most important and useful caches of documents that became available since the fifties not only have been used by Holroyd but are now in print, although they were not fully so while he was doing his work: Dan Laurence's recently completed volumes of selected letters (with their extremely informative headnotes and footnotes); and the two volumes of diaries, edited by Stanley Weintraub and issued in 1986. Hesketh Pearson provided a chapter on Shaw's "women," but the information was sparse. Henderson, while providing much detail about Shaw's childhood, made no mention of Alice Lockett, Jenny Patterson, or even Shaw's addiction to Jaeger wool suits, subjects about which Holroyd has plenty to say. In a word, Henderson's account is mainly concerned with the public career, and even on Shaw's marriage he offers next to nothing. According to Weintraub, Shaw's secretary, Blanche Patch, had begun late in Shaw's life to work on a somewhat surreptitious

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translation of the shorthand diaries of 1885–97, although she made frequent bowdlerizations, omissions, and errors. Thus, Ervine had access to and made good use of them. As early as 1956, he was able to provide personal details that were not to be found in the rival accounts. Since these diaries are a principal source of information about Shaw's love life and journalism of the eighties, Holroyd has made even more extensive use of them than Ervine, having consulted them some time before Weintraub put them into print but after they were rendered more readable than they had been for Ervine. And with all the unpublished collections and helpful people he has seen, this undertaking involves the most complete mastery to date of the Shaw archives, both floating and fixed, even if we do not know exactly what those archives contain.

Although other biographers give considerable weight to Shaw's family life as a child, Holroyd regards his mother Bessie's coldness and lack of affection for Sonny as the radical germ of his personality and the driving force of his career. He traces the theme of mother love and its absence (along with the corresponding need to subvert authority and remain emotionally unbeholden to others) through the five novels, many of the plays, and countless Shavian human relations. So, from the *The Irrational Knot*, for example, Holroyd quotes a character who laments, "Can you understand that a mother and a son may be so different in their dispositions that neither can sympathize with the other? It is my great misfortune to be such a son . . . she felt nothing for me but a contemptuous fondness which I did not care to accept," and so on. The extraordinary Shavian language machine—and machine was a word often used in connection with Shaw, as when Yeats dreamed of him as a smiling, clicking sewing machine—is seen by Holroyd as an obsessive and frenetic substitute gratification. "There were three categories of relationship in Shaw's life: flirtations with single women, usually at this [early] time young Fabian girls; philanderings with the wives of friends, usually socialist colleagues; and a consummated love affair with a divorced or separated lady. With Alice Lockett he had tried in a conventional way to combine all his emotional needs in one person, and failing, concluded that it could not be done." But the period of intense sexual involvement was brief and emotionally

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unrewarding, as badly as he needed it at the time. It was *talking*, in its largest sense, that provided a more profoundly satisfying medium of expression; and the engine of this talking was a generalized love of mankind rather than an individualized romantic love, for which, as we know from plays like *The Devil's Disciple*, he had little but contempt. In place of an unsatisfactory Eros that excessively divided the sexual from the rest of life, he preferred an Agape that was not subject to the whims of the hormones and that seems in his case to have operated principally through language. In establishing a de-sexualized marriage relationship with Charlotte Payne-Townshend, GBS appears to have made a wise choice, although Ervine thinks a little sex would not have done them any harm. Eric Bentley, in what is generally thought of as one of the best critical treatments of Shaw, summed up his rhetorical, impersonal, jesting/loving persona as "the fool in Christ."

What differentiates the "search for love" in the Strachey biography from the search in the Shaw, and what contributes to the two biographies' dissimilarity as literary accomplishments is that sex, eros, and the need for intimacy are undisguisedly and powerfully present throughout most of the documents and events of Strachey's life, which was in any case a more domestic and personal one than Shaw's. They required very little overt, interfering "interpretation" from the biographer while supplying a unity of tone and feeling that is one of the biography's greatest strengths. In connection with Shaw, however, the search for love is a thematic grid that the biographer employs to unify his narrative. It is certainly plausible, this deprivation of maternal affection and the quest for a surrogate as Holroyd traces them throughout these early years of his life, but it is clearly a schema, drawn admittedly from many persuasive instances, but nevertheless a case of authorial imposition. Thus,

> In his relationships with women Shaw was seeking a second childhood in which he could receive all the attention and happiness he had been denied by his mother. But since it was impossible for him literally to achieve this, he shifted his desires into his literary life. Sexual excitement produced in him an ejaculation of words from which letters were conceived, novels and plays born. Any sexual relationship that could not provide an alternate world, partly made out of words, tended to disgust him.

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Such metaphoric psychologizing has become by now a naturalized method of understanding experience, just as God's will was a "natural" thematizer in the past. So today the result of a cold mother is likely to be a search for love. Yet when we realize how dated even Freudian explanations have already become, we also recognize that there are fashions in explanatory schemata as in everything else: much that was attributed to the psyche a few decades ago is increasingly attributed to chemicals, genes, social forces, or "epistemes." This, then, is a troubling concern of any biographer: how to unify his narrative without making implausible or obsolescent thematic claims. In *Lytton Strachey* this important responsibility of the biographer was accomplished more through organization and selection than through overt insistence, hence the book's emotional power. In *Bernard Shaw: The Search for Love* the imposition of a thematizing program causes a distancing from the biographical materials that did not occur in the earlier work.

This distancing, as well as the rather recalcitrant nature of Shaw as a biographical subject, encumbers Holroyd with various problems of execution. Although he is always sophisticated, witty, intelligent, and appallingly knowledgeable about more than just Shaw, the early years present obstacles of narration that he is not entirely successful in overcoming. His pulling together of myriad disparate materials, required for handling almost anybody's childhood and youth, results here in a tendency toward chronicle or history rather than a seamless narrative, with sudden changes of subject, paragraphs of hard-to-follow exposition, extensive pastiches of quoted phrases, alternation between brilliant and purely functional narrative voices, and a certain amount of riding his themes. In discussing, for example, Shaw's last novel, *An Unsocial Socialist* (and he is prone to describe novels, plays and reviews at tiresome length), he writes:

> Agatha [in the novel] is incorruptible, but everyone is to some extent corrupted. In a letter to Alice Lockett, Shaw regretted that they had not met in Ireland where she could have seen 'the round towers of other days in the wave beneath you shining there'. Though pretty and green, 'England is a vile country,' he wrote. 'I speak not of the men and women—they are vile everywhere; but of the scenery.' Shaw deliberately picked up the vulgarities of his

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> enemies and came to battle as well-armoured as they were. Trefusis [in the novel] is similarly affected by the society in which he lives. 'I can only say that Trefusis was none of my making,' Shaw wrote to one of his correspondents.

Incoherences like this are frequent in the first half of the book, during which the reader often becomes too conscious of the mechanics of his own reading. In the second half, with Holroyd fired by the psychologically richer interests of Shaw's life, the prose warms up and smooths out.

Holroyd's most insurmountable problem, however, turns out to be Shaw himself: Shaw/Rhetor, to be exact, the nonstop talking machine par excellence. The Shaw Estate's concern to produce a new life without Shaw hovering over the biographer's shoulder or sending him ceaseless correspondence was well founded. As things have turned out, Holroyd *is* remarkably independent in some respects. But for *his* version of the early years, St John Ervine managed to produce a story much freer of Shavian echoes because he rationed the use of brief quoted phrases, reserving quotation for key moments in the narrative, where he was disposed to use fairly substantial chunks. This gives Ervine the effect of having greater control over the teller's voice, producing a more fluent and coherent delivery as well. But probably more important than this, Ervine was a deeply affectionate friend of Shaw, so that even his most dismissive remarks issue from a bedrock of warm feeling and a well-defined point of view. Holroyd is judicious, fair-minded, sympathetic, admiring, interested, but Shaw does not really engage his sensibilities the way Strachey was able to do.

Along with the problem of "voice," the fact of Shaw/Rhetor means that there is very little distinction to be made between Shaw's public and private utterances. Whether he is writing a letter to his mistress or a letter to the editor, a Fabian tract or the preface to one of his plays, he sounds remarkably the same. No matter how much of him one reads, one feels as distant from the "real" center as ever. Holroyd's criticism of Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia Woolf, "We see something of what it was like looking at her, less of what it was like for her looking at us," must inevitably apply to his own as well. But one assumes that whereas a biography *could* be written about Woolf (given the nature of her letters and diaries) that gets closer to the

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center than Bell's, it would be virtually impossible for anyone to get very close to Shaw. The handicap is not so much one of the biographer's art as of the nature of the biographical subject. In an oft-quoted passage that Shaw wrote late in life about his youthful meeting with May Morris, William Morris' daughter, we get the full Shaw/Rhetor flavor: "I was immediately conscious that a Mystic Betrothal was registered in heaven, to be fulfilled when all the material obstacles should melt away, and my own position rescued from the squalors of my poverty and unsuccess . . ."

So many variants of this rhetoric, a making-it-so-through-language, abound in the Shavian corpus that we are not surprised, as Volume One draws to a close around the time GBS marries Charlotte Payne-Townshend, to find Holroyd asking, "But what did Shaw think? Charlotte had not seen his mind, despite his flow of words, because he had not revealed it to her." This passage could well serve as epigraph to any biography of Shaw. For the flow of words *is* Shaw's mind and no one can reconstruct what it might be that lies behind them. More than with most people, the Shavian flow of words seems less to *represent* than to *constitute* a self.

With more information at his disposal than any previous biographer, Holroyd is certainly able to provide denser accounts of Shaw's earlier life, of the sad publishing history of his early writings, of the genesis and development of his plays, of their failure on the stage, of his attempts to break into the West End Theater, and of his extraordinary involvement in the publication of his plays for a novel-reading audience. Indeed, his arrival at the weightier phases of Shaw's career releases Holroyd's powers, so that he takes more vigorous and feeling control of his story, with less reliance on thematizing, and the reader begins to be carried along.

These are several of the undeniable strengths for which Holroyd deserves to be praised. Yet, while keeping in mind that we are dealing with an unfinished work, I find that it is the revised *Lytton Strachey* rather than *Bernard Shaw* that comes off as a product of very high art indeed. With its complex, distinctive, narrative voice—a fusion of subject and biographer—and its propulsive emotional energy, it is the sort of event that cannot simply be willed into existence. *Bernard Shaw:*

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The Search for Love arises from soil that is very fertile but whose circumstances are far from nurturing. Its biographical subject is a rhetorical killer, always threatening to shout down his biographer. A number of previous attempts have already been made at a life, of which St John Ervine's succeeds by virtue of an artless artistry, a narrative grace, a warmth towards its subject, and a distinction of voice that Holroyd's version so far does not outshine. The materials, while immense and varied, are largely familiar but too diverse to produce a clear effect through any tendency of their own, thereby asking to be cut down to size by means of a unifying narrative persona that came easy to Ervine but that Holroyd does not seem able to supply. The "authorized" biographer has inherited a one-size-fits-all mantle subject to prior use and perhaps implying more than anyone can definitely deliver. Although the critical response this time around has been as positive as any author could wish, it may in fact be attributable to the safety and conventionality of the treatment, as well as to materials more intrinsically interesting and familiar, and therefore more congenial. But I am as disinclined to give too much weight to today's immediate reaction as I have been to the reaction of twenty years past. The Strachey biography was a Dionysian orgy set off by some explosive conjunction of the planets, and it required both temporal and cultural space in order to domesticate a more properly "Wagnerian" appreciation. The Shaw biography is cerebral and Apollonian, admittedly the work of a first-order archival authority, and worthy of being the new standard reference. But while violating few sensibilities, as biographical literary art it thus far emanates from a harp imperfectly tuned and with strings that may not lend themselves to precision tightening.

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ROBERT McDOWELL

It Should Never Happen to You

There was nothing to do in Henderson, Kentucky on a hot summer day. Ricky lay on his bed in an efficiency apartment on the second floor of Mrs. Irvin's boarding house, wearing nothing but pants and a muscle T-shirt. The venetian blind over his one window was closed, but he did not sleep. On his back with his hands over his eyes, he listened to the chatter of the portable air conditioner. Though he had left it on for the last twenty-four hours, it had not really cooled the room off; it had just moved the air around a little, which was stale with dirty socks, cigarette smoke, and garlic. Ricky had eaten Italian across the Ohio River in Evansville, Indiana the night before.

Ricky Scavone was an Italian buck from day one. He had grown up the sixth kid, but first son, in a family of ten in Miami. His dad worked in construction, his momma cooked, cleaned, and spent herself in the heroic, losing effort to keep her family together. It was she who had always called him Ricky—not Ricardo, as his father called him, or Richard, Rick, or Dick. Even when he turned thirteen and demanded a more adult-sounding variant, she insisted on Ricky, and the name stuck.

When at seventeen the allure of New York overpowered him, everyone called him Ricky, and he was proud of it. If there truly is power in a name, then Ricky's personality was ample evidence to support the contention. Set up in a shabby apartment on the Lower West Side, with a roommate he'd found through an ad in the *Village Voice*, he looked back on a history of playing Ricky the Kid, Ricky the Cut-Up, Ricky the Daredevil. Now he wanted to be a movie star. Not an actor, necessarily, but a star.

He had, after all, the rakish Sicilian good looks of the men on his father's side of the family, his mother's smooth olive skin; he watched his weight and had pumped iron since he was fourteen. He had nerve, too, the shameless quick wit and mouth of a performer.

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One month after hitting Manhattan things were going well for Ricky Scavone. He worked as a bagger at a grocery store two blocks from his apartment, and his roommate, also an aspiring performer, had introduced him to the producer of a small off-off-Broadway company who was casting for a group of one-act student plays. Ricky was least surprised of anyone when the producer offered him the lead in a modest romantic farce in which the three characters moved around a drawing room set, discussing their feelings for thirty minutes. If the job did not pay a salary, Ricky was getting experience and exposure. The few critics bothering to write about the production were lukewarm toward the newcomer.

Not so the producer. He offered Ricky the role of an Italian gangster in a summer stock production beginning in Memphis, Tennessee. As the company left New York in June for six weeks on the road, Ricky imagined coming back a celebrity, turning down offers from the soaps for the plum role in Hollywood. But almost immediately things went badly. Ricky feuded with the director over the delivery of his lines, and the delicate leading lady was turned off by his advances. Ricky was lonely and persistent, but she stayed that way. Two weeks into the tour, in Knoxville, she slept with the director, and Ricky was on the permanent outs with both of them.

It didn't help Ricky's mood that the small crowds they played to left uninspired by their efforts, that the theatres they played in were cramped and under-equipped. Some you couldn't call theatres at all; these were converted stores or warehouses; occasionally, they even played in cafeterias. After three weeks, there was general consensus among the cast and crew that they were trapped in an absurd nightmare.

At the beginning of the fourth week, the company pulled in to Evansville, Indiana and commenced preparations for four performances over the weekend. All but Ricky, that is. He and the director had sniped at each other on the bus for two hours. As they pulled into the Greyhound station, the leading lady was in tears, the director had a swelling bump over one eye, and Ricky hustled off the bus and just walked away. Around the corner he noticed a blue collar bar and went in.

The dark interior of the bar smelled damp, but Ricky welcomed the escape from the heat and humidity outside.

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Passing the bar where two railroad men sipped beer as they watched wrestling on the TV's cable sports channel, Ricky chose a table in the back and sat down. In a moment, a girl appeared at his table. Often in the days to come, Ricky would recall that key occasion, trying to define what it was about her that made him sit up and clear his throat.

She was small-boned and shorter than he was, with curly blonde hair and skin that hadn't seen much sun lately. Looking up at her, Ricky thought that her skin was so white he could see through her. She wore tight black jeans and a powder blue halter-top that matched the color of her eyes. She stood there in flats, the trademark of the waitress who is on her feet too much, and asked what he wanted to drink. The way she asked, in a slow, deep, lilting drawl, made Ricky think that she might be asking a lot more. The look in her eyes seemed to back this up, the lewd look of the vamp, and Ricky smiled.

"Bring me a boilermaker," he said, "and have one yourself, on me, if you'd like."

The girl smiled. "I don't drink with strangers, as a rule. But if you stick around for an hour till I get off, you might get lucky."

"I could use some luck," Ricky said, arching one dark eyebrow, an expression he'd taught himself through endless hours of practice before a mirror.

For the next hour Ricky nursed his drink and made a show of watching the wrestling up on TV, but he was really watching the girl. She knew it, too, and studied him from the corner of her eye as she kidded with the guys at the bar or shuttled drinks to other tables. Once, she leaned dramatically across a table to pick up the empties and held the pose a moment longer than was necessary. Then she coyly looked back over her shoulder, catching Ricky leaning forward, staring at the tight outline of her ass. And later, when her deep well of a laugh filled the room, he felt a chill shoot through him and his breathing get shallow. He had just finished off the shot of whiskey and the beer when the girl brought a refill and the same for herself. She sat down.

"So, stranger, I'm Mona. Who and what are you?"

"I'm Ricky Scavone. I'm an actor. We're doing some shows this weekend."

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"Wow." She rolled her eyes and spoke in an exaggerated voice. "I never met an *actor* before. Here's looking at you."

"Cheers."

They lowered their glasses and stared at each other until they both laughed.

"I knew right off that you weren't from around here," Mona said. "I mean, you don't look like a railroad man."

"Is that all you have to choose from in this town?"

"Well, there's a couple of colleges here if you're into students. I've had a few laughs that way. There's mines across the river, but those guys never get the coal dust out from under their nails. Where you from?"

"Florida and New York. New York, lately. You like the theatre?"

"Wow," she said again. "Yeah, I *love* performance." She ran the fingers of her right hand slowly up and down the frosty sides of her beer mug.

Ricky felt the urge to reach under the table and stroke her thigh. He resisted, but leaned toward her, talking fast about living in New York and acting. He talked to impress her, embellishing the facts, pumping up his past. She smiled, laughing, and stroked her beer mug. When she steadied his hand as he lit her cigarette, Ricky could hardly keep himself from kissing her.

"Come to the show tomorrow night," he said. "Maybe you could show me around afterwards."

"Can't. I'm working."

"What about Saturday?"

"Sorry."

"Sunday, then. The matinee. You can't work all the time."

"I'm not working then. Sure you want me to come?"

"I'm asking you, aren't I?"

"Begging is more like it. You desperate? Afraid nobody'll show up? Just kidding. OK, I'll come."

"Great!" Ricky grabbed her hand and held on to it.

After the Sunday matinee, they walked down on the levee to a seafood restaurant where Mona introduced him to catfish fried in a crisp batter. They drank a bottle of white wine, and Mona critiqued the play and his performance. The love triangle

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story wasn't believable, she said. She couldn't buy it that the girl the guy was cheating on would put up with the situation.

"The way they all stayed friends and sat around talking, sharing their suffering, rolling in it. That's not real life," she said.

"Of course it's not real life. It's art. You an expert on that, too?"

"I don't claim to know anything about *art*, but I know phony when I see it. Geez! In real life that girl would have gone down to the pawn shop and bought a gun and threatened to blow away the other girl. Or the guy, or both."

"That's cheap melodrama," Ricky said.

"Then that's the name for the way most people live around here, anyway."

"Sounds like you should have written the damn script. But you didn't, did you?"

"I don't have to. I've lived it."

This response made Mona even more attractive to Ricky. It made her seem more dangerous, too, and he leaned a little closer, breathing in the smell of her.

"Well," he said, "at least you thought I was OK, right?"

"Oh, you were good," Mona said, "when you weren't hamming it up."

Ricky squeezed the stem of his wineglass until his knuckles went white.

"Ham? You saying that I was a ham?"

"Not all the time. Just when you arched your eyebrows and made faces to get the audience to look at you instead of at the actor who was talking. You know."

Though Ricky felt angry, he did know. He had always overacted, stealing scenes with his mugging, violating his blocking, or trampling over another actor's lines. He knew that he never fooled his peers or the critics in New York, but how could some oversexed floozie in a podunk Midwestern town see through him? And her with no art in her blood to speak of. Ricky wanted to hurt Mona for her honesty. He wanted to dominate her with his worldliness, make her want him, then dump her flat. He was also desperate to stay with her. She talked straight to him. She made him tremble.

As they walked out to the parking lot, Ricky could resist no

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longer. Taking hold of Mona's shoulders, he turned her to face him and kissed her hard on the lips. She kept her eyes open through the kiss, and the look there was mildly mocking, surprised and delighted. Ricky had hoped to find surrender and gratitude there, but he realized that if he held up a mirror in that instant, he would have found them in his own eyes.

After some heavy petting in her car, during which Mona mercilessly teased him, she drove them over the bridge to Kentucky and her small house four miles from the center of Henderson. In her bed Ricky spent the night discovering things he had never known, and when morning broke he had lost all desire to go. They stayed together through the next day, paying no mind to the fact that Ricky missed his afternoon performance and his five o'clock bus. When Mona took him out to eat at the only Italian restaurant in Henderson, he phoned the hotel in Bloomington where the company was headed and left a simple message for the director: *Bloat up and Die! I Quit. Ricky Scavone.*

For three weeks Mona and Ricky rivaled the great lovers as she showed off her native haunts. They made the rounds of the handful of mediocre restaurants in Evansville across the Ohio; she drove him to New Harmony where they spent two nights at the inn, taking meals in their room; she drove him for miles through the soybean fields and corn rows as she described growing up on her father's farm in southern Illinois.

Imagining that life in the heartland, Ricky forgot about his own family in Florida. His room in New York and his acting career seemed remote, part of a distant life whose skin he was shedding as he entered the smothering, seductive body of the Midwest. He was losing himself in Mona's body, Mona's voice, Mona's words and thoughts. When she left him to go to work, he stayed in her room awaiting her return. To fill up the time, he went through her drawers, holding up nightgowns and underclothes, imagining her in them and turning that look on him, that taunting yet inviting look. Opening her closet door, he stepped inside and breathed deeply the close smell of her. Kneeling down, almost dizzy, he caressed her shoes and thought of her lazy screams when he worked her feet and toes with his tongue. Rubbing the side of a black boot, his fingers

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found the zipper. He worked it up and down, and the sound thrilled him.

For two months Ricky lived that way, but then Mona began to spend more and more time in town without him. His first reaction was to sulk, then he began to carp at her. She countered by never sitting still for interrogation; she belittled him, making light of his insecurity.

In fact, she had already grown tired of him. She resented how much he needed her and was embarrassed by the way he clung to her in public. She felt sorry for him, too, the way one feels pity for a dependent dog, so she repressed the urge to tell him to piss off, to go back to New York or find his own place for a while. She hoped he would get the message, but his stubborn refusal to do so made her brazen. She stayed out later and later, and one night she did not come back at all. The next night he borrowed a car and went out looking for her. After an hour, he spotted her firebird at The Pub, a bar & grill on Evansville's west side. At the bar he found her laughing and drinking with two burly blue collar types. When one leaned over and kissed her neck, Ricky snapped.

What happened next passed in a blur, ending with Ricky lying out on the pavement, holding his sore head in his hands. His lip was split, and he could taste his own blood. He wondered if he had really heard Mona tell him to leave her alone, to have his things out of her house when she got home. Back at her place, he waited up all night to talk it over, but Mona did not appear.

When Mona did show up at two o'clock the next afternoon, Ricky screamed, wept, and begged her to reconsider. None of it moved her. Finally, he said that he would leave. He would find a room in town and call her in a week when they had both calmed down. Mona went into the bathroom and locked the door. As he gathered his things and walked out, Ricky could hear the bath water running.

Six months later he was still waiting in Mrs. Irvin's second-floor room for Mona to take him back. When he phoned her she would hang up on him. He left notes on her car's windshield, but she never answered any of them. He even sent flowers once, which the florist informed him she had refused.

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Meanwhile, to support himself, he signed on short-term construction jobs, and on one job site he met Cletus.

Cletus, a Henderson native, struck everyone as a loser. He was fat, ugly, and gullible, as stupid, those who knew him said, as anyone could be. But Ricky felt sorry for Cletus, who responded by desperately glomming on to the east coast boy. When they worked on the same crew, Cletus would hang around waiting for Ricky to clean up, then he'd suggest they grab a bite to eat or have a few beers and catch a ball game. Because Ricky had nothing better to do, he usually said OK, and they'd climb into Ricky's battered used pick-up and head for town. As far as Cletus was concerned, hanging out with Ricky brought him more status than he'd ever had in his life. In return, he became Ricky's entranced audience of one. Cletus was never so happy as when he could sit in a dark bar with his big mitts around a mug of draft and listen to Ricky talk on and on about the theatre, the sunkissed girls of Miami, the adult, edgy streets of New York.

On Saturdays and Sundays Mrs. Irvin served a big meal in the parlor for her tenants, and for two dollars more one could invite a guest. The meals were heavy Midwestern fare—meat and potatoes, cornbread and vegetable casseroles in thick tomato sauces, rich pies or cakes for dessert. Ricky seldom missed these meals, and shortly after meeting up with Cletus he began to bring his sidekick to dinner with him. They were usually joined by Sadie and Chris, a young couple sharing the large apartment downstairs, and a wiry gray man called Slim, who lived in the efficiency across the hall from Ricky. Mrs. Irvin bustled in and out of the kitchen, serving food and seeing to it that conversation stayed wholesome and avoided confrontation.

She needn't have bothered. Casual talk among such folk, brought together purely by the pangs of hunger, was practically non-existent save for the usual requests to pass the salt and pepper, the butter or gravy. Occasionally, someone in a chatty mood would mention a new job or an item of local or national news, but the others inevitably spurned the inviting strand. The ferocious sounds of serious eating dominated the parlor.

Ricky had long ago come to the conclusion that the reluctance to engage in conversation had a lot to do with the

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presence of Mrs. Irvin. She was Authority, Mother and Boss, and one did not easily lighten up in her orbit. Away from the table, the tenants chatted now and then at the mailboxes or in passing each other in the hall. Sadie and Chris had even invited Ricky and Cletus to a small party once. On that night Chris and Ricky had talked for an hour about sailing, one of Chris's and Sadie's passions, while Cletus sat silently on the couch eating chips and dip, making moon eyes at Sadie. Twice since the party Ricky had bumped into Sadie late at night on the stairs and sat down to talk. Slim, notoriously still, simply nodded to the others when their paths crossed.

It was natural in such a house that Ricky would begin to be more and more interested in his young neighbors downstairs. On some nights, before falling asleep, he would lie on his bed and think about Chris, who was very thin and pale (odd for so much sailing), and always wore white. He had a soundless way of moving, and Ricky was never sure when he was in his room or out. Sadie was more flamboyant, and more to his liking. Dressed in black with shiny shoulder-length black hair and full red lips, she reminded Ricky of the fairy-tale character, Rose Red. A native of Washington, D.C., she had moved to Henderson, she once said, to get away from the pulse of cities and the primary targets of a nuclear first strike. She had a distant, breathless way of speaking, as if she were receiving and interpreting messages from someplace beyond.

In getting over Mona, an affliction from which Ricky had not yet recovered, he had gradually discovered that he had lost all desire for the company of women. When he went out drinking with Cletus, and they danced with the heavily made up regulars in their early twenties, Ricky declined all suggestions that he join someone in a slow dance until dawn. He preferred to drop Cletus off and drive home alone, where he'd pass out in his own bed after caressing the remote, taunting images in skin magazines that reminded him of Mona.

But in waking one morning to the close summer heat, he found himself thinking of Sadie, who had run into him late the night before as he climbed the stairs. Quietly shutting the door to her apartment, she had smiled and sat down on the carpeted stair in her black robe. She patted the space beside her.

"Tell me about your evening," she said.

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And Ricky sat down, reciting his usual ritual of picking Cletus up, eating Italian, and drinking at a nightclub until closing.

"He's got a crush on you, you know. Cletus, I mean."

"He's lonely," Sadie said, as if the news had occurred to her long ago and was wholly natural. "We're all lonely."

Ricky thought of his loneliness, and it was true. "Not you, though. I mean, you and Chris."

She made a face that confused him, then smiled again.

"We can't own one another. Sometimes I think that if we could it would solve so many problems, you know? Do you believe in fortunetellers?"

The question surprised him. Ricky thought about it, how he'd always scoffed at superstition.

"Only as another kind of theatre," he said.

The look behind her smile unnerved him, peeling back the protective cynical layers he hid behind.

"You don't mean it," she said, "but I understand why you say it. My first lover, he's dead now, said things like that. Your mother was a good Catholic, and she raised you to be one?"

While Ricky struggled in his head to sort out the unlikely twin images of his mother and Sadie's dead, anonymous lover, he merely nodded his head. As the lover's image slipped into the background, Ricky saw his mother rubbing her rosary as she'd prayed over some indiscretion he'd committed at school. And once, when he was sick, she had pinned a cluster of herbs on his bedroom door.

Facing these memories made Ricky face his own lifelong superstitions. As a child, he had always walked the same route to school. When he got his first bicycle he would not ride it unless a Roger Maris baseball card was fixed to the spokes. On dates, for two years after he'd discovered girls, he had to wear the same striped shirt. And later, on his own in New York, he had easily entered the superstitious cult of the theatre. Without doubt, Ricky's life had always been shadowed by rituals he practiced without conscious thought. This made him feel desperate, like running from himself, the house he was in, the woman who sat beside him. It also made him feel lethargic. He wanted to lean into her knowledge for comfort, for guidance. Her eyes watching his seemed to say that she had read all that had just passed through his mind. The look terrified him. If

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only he could speak, and by speaking restore some balanced neutrality to their sitting down together.

"Where's Chris?" he managed at last.

"Preparing," Sadie said. "We're going boating tomorrow on the river. You like the water, I know. We hear so much these days about Mother Earth, but earth is mostly water. Like us. Yet it moves just beyond us, waiting patiently to take us back. Water is the true mother."

Ricky's mouth and throat were dry. He stood up, trying unsuccessfully to wet his lips with his tongue.

"Have fun tomorrow," he said. "I've got to go."

"Good night," she said, releasing him.

Taking the stairs two at a time, Ricky trotted down the hall to his room. Inside he locked the door and leaned against it, then dampened the sleeve of his shirt by running it across his forehead. Though the room was stifling, he kicked off his shoes, got into bed, and pulled the covers up around him. He shook like a child until he slept.

In the early afternoon of the following day, Ricky lay on the sweat-soaked fitted sheet, staring at the ceiling. When the phone rang and would not stop, he reached over to the nightstand and lifted the receiver. It was Cletus. Ricky told him no, he didn't want to go out today; maybe tomorrow. Cletus would phone him up then around eleven. Ricky hung up and resumed staring. Through the rest of the day and night he stayed there, except for a one-hour soak in the claw-footed bathtub. He seldom took baths, but he gave in to a great urge to be floating. It was a day to drift out of his pattern.

The next day, Ricky woke at seven, feeling refreshed and relieved to note that he had not dreamed of water, or Mona, or the strange woman and her lover living one floor below. When Cletus called at eleven, Ricky was dressed and agreed to meet him for a late breakfast at Cal's truckstop cafe.

After breakfast they walked to the state park, where they toured the Audubon house. Both had lost count of the times they had visited one of the residences of that obsessed chronicler of birds, but they lingered again in the upstairs room that contained a fascinating sidelight, the artist's extensive butterfly collection. Ricky never got over it, so much tropical color pinned to thin sheets of soft wood. He tried to imagine the

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artist at work, the curious collector who loved life so much he killed it to freeze its beauty for all time. But it was easier for Ricky to imagine the last moments of the drugged specimens. Cletus was not burdened so, walking behind Ricky, absorbing his friend's comments and emotions.

Leaving the house, they walked a mile up one of the shady paths, then doubled back and strolled down Highway 41 to Main Street.

Main Street in Henderson rambled on for all of two blocks. On it were three stoplights, four bars, a convenience-and-drug store, a deserted warehouse, a movie house, a barber shop, a branch of the county bank, a mortuary, the police and fire stations, and three vacant lots where schoolboys got up football or baseball games, according to the season. Ricky and Cletus, who by now had stripped down to their white, sleeveless T-shirts, paused at the first lot they came to and watched a dozen kids ignoring the heat in a fierce hardball contest. They walked on and turned into the Hilltop bar.

An hour and four beers later they were out in the heat again, ambling down the last block. The air was thick and moist, like the inside of a steam room. With that deep in their lungs, they had the vague sensation of drowning.

"This danged heat," Cletus said, slumping against a lamp-post. "I feel like a soft bean in burgoo."

Ricky looked at his friend's red face and big belly, and laughed to think of Cletus cooked up and served for lunch back at the Hilltop.

"Get your mind off it," Ricky said, looking around.

"And just how in a cockroach's armpit am I supposed to do that."

Ricky spotted something. He pulled his shirt on over his head. "Get into that shirt and follow me."

Cletus did so and trailed after Ricky up the street until they came to the curb outside Quail's Funeral Home.

"Let's go in and see who's dead," Ricky said.

"Geez!" Cletus said as Ricky walked into the parlor. Shaking his head, stepping gingerly, he went in, too.

A bald man in mourning clothes stopped them just inside the door.

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"Excuse me. Are you friends of the deceased?" The bald man spoke like a melancholy but threatening parent.

Warming to the theatricality of the situation, Ricky coolly assured the bald man that he was a friend, a close friend. He installed a little catch in his voice as he answered. Meanwhile, Cletus had decided that he really didn't want to look at a corpse. He told the bald man that he did not know the deceased, that he was just tagging along.

"So I'll wait out here," he said, and walked over to a red velvet chair and sat down, thankful for the Home's air conditioning. Ricky turned to make a face at his friend, then calmly parted the beaded curtain and walked in.

He stopped, surprised to see that the inner room, the slumber room, was full of sad people in somber dress. The unsettling sound of crying and the sickly sweet smell of flowers nearly staggered him, but something about the long black hair and the back of one woman's head drew him forward. The woman, all in black with a veil over her face, knelt in front of the casket. Ricky got up on the balls of his feet and moved through the grieving cluster. It took him ten strides or so to get close enough to the casket to see the body inside, and when he glanced at the face his confident air vanished.

Behind the kneeling woman's right shoulder, he stared down at the made-up, faintly smiling face of Chris, his co-tenant at Mrs. Irvin's boarding house. He thought he might be dreaming, then he heard his name spoken over and over. The kneeling woman had stood up and clutched his arm.

"Oh, Ricky. Ricky. I cast my thoughts to you. I wanted you to come, and here you are."

Ricky looked into Sadie's wild face behind the veil. When he opened his mouth, no words came, but he could see her reading, or making up, the bits and pieces of his thoughts.

"I can't now," she said. "Take me out of this. Take me home."

She leaned heavily into him. As Ricky put his arm around her to guide her to the door, he felt the spring go out of his legs. Bewildered, he responded to the pressure of her body by tightening his hold on her and lowering his head to catch the scent of her hair. In the parlor, away from the heavy flowers, he glanced over for his friend, but the chair that Cletus had been sitting in was empty. He wondered if he had imagined their

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aimless afternoon together. Was Sadie's mind really reining in his own? What had she said about drawing him to her?

The bald man opened the door for them, and they walked out into the humid air. Sadie's grip on his arm seemed stronger, and he followed as she guided him up the street. Back at the boarding house they sat in Sadie's room talking. Ricky listened to Sadie's account of how Chris stood up in the boat, lost his balance, and disappeared beneath the water. According to Sadie, he didn't even struggle. When she cried, Ricky agreed to stay with her.

For the next two weeks, they hardly ever left Sadie's room. The two ate, slept, and bathed together. Often they ignored the phone, and when Sadie did answer she quickly cut the caller off. When Ricky wasn't rubbing down her back, her legs and feet, or making love to her, or listening as she spoke, he lounged around in Chris's clothes and read articles on astrology and the occult to her. The material got into his head, putting distance between the moments when he noticed that his hours were marked by high agitation and his perception that the image of Mona and the presence of Sadie blended together into one seductive Midwestern body of ongoing sex.

Only on rare occasions, when he found himself alone, did Ricky see his life unravelling. He wondered what had become of ambition, his desire to make himself a star. Somehow, this foray into the heartland between the two coasts had bogged him down. He thought of what the coming weeks and months might bring, but none of the scenes he came up with matched the life's course he had always imagined. Hating his indolence, his self-loathing would endure until Sadie would come back urgently needing him.

Only once did they argue. One night Cletus knocked on the door. Ricky stayed out of sight in a chair and listened as Sadie made excuses and sent him away. When she sat down beside him, Ricky raised his voice to her, asking what they were up to, the two of them, and what was wrong with letting other people into their life together.

"Other people? We don't need them," Sadie said. "Not yet. You understand?"

"I do. I understand we're sick. This isn't . . . natural."

Before he could stop himself, Ricky had run past her out the

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door and up the flight of stairs to his own room. Locking the door behind him, he faced the dark, musty room that smelled of his former life. In the closet he found and pulled out his suitcase. He opened it, laying it out on the bed. Then he backed up a couple of steps and collapsed in a chair. Beads of sweat popped out all over his face, and his heartbeat slowed. He saw it clearly. Mona, Sadie, and this stifling little town on the Mason-Dixon Line made up his stage, his bully pulpit from which he proclaimed his life's futility in a minor key. Then he heard Sadie's voice, insistent and calm, on the other side of the door. Rising stiffly from the chair, he crossed the room and let her in. In the weak light they stood facing each other. Ricky waited, certain only that the vast emptiness inside him would be filled by her.

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GILBERTO PEREZ

Landscape and Fiction: Jean Renoir's Country Excursion

Microphone in hand, the television reporter stands in front of the White House or in the streets of Beirut, addressing us from the scene of the news. This lends an aura of truth to the newscast. That reliable witness, the camera, testifies to the reporter's presence on the spot, and thereby abets the impression that the reporter too is a reliable witness. A painted backdrop of the scene wouldn't be nearly as persuasive in soliciting our trust, which is why the networks go to the trouble and expense of shooting on location when the news report could more easily have been delivered from a studio. But the camera's visual testimony, though presented as being of a piece with the verbal report, is extrinsic to it and little relevant to its content, a factual garnish to the words that carry the newscast's meaning. Words are what the newscast is about, words capable of bias or falsehood regardless of their place of delivery: spoken from a studio, printed on a page, those words the reporter speaks from the scene of the news would evidently be saying the same thing. It's a specious credibility that the news report gains from the location, an aura of truth without warrant, itself a sort of falsehood. Although intended to seem so, the reporter's words do not become more trustworthy by virtue of the camera-reproduced White House or Beirut streets we glimpse in back; such visual signs of actuality may as well have been painted backdrops, since they add nothing of substance to the words, the signs that count in the message being conveyed. The camera's claim to truth, the direct record it supplies of actual appearances, serves here to foster what amounts to a visual lie.

So much for the simplistic notion that the camera doesn't lie: lying or telling the truth is the province not of cameras but of the human beings who use them, put them to a purpose. In a

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way the camera deceives us, by its very directness, whenever its reproductions of reality seem so immediate that we take them as reality itself, forgetting that, like all pictures, these are a fabrication, a mirage. Spellbound by the mirage of movies, some theorists (Siegfried Kracauer, the more subtle and perceptive André Bazin) propose to ignore the difference between watching a film and our experience of reality, as if no artifice came between us and the sea being shown on the screen, the trees going by in a traveling shot, as if that sea and those trees weren't pictures, projected images made up of light and shadows, flimsier in fact than any props on a theater stage.

And yet this phantom medium can carry a charge of reality unattainable in the theater because derived by the camera from its involvement with actual things. All the world, because of the camera's access to it, may be enlisted as a stage for films. Granted, images are what are displayed on the screen, not pieces of the world, but images taken directly from the world can render its sights with vivid authenticity: not the same thing as being there in reality, to be sure, but not unmixed make-believe either. If the reality theorists are mistaken, so are those who see in films only convention and contrivance, disregarding their ability to capture the look, the imprint, of actual things. Neither real nor a mere fakery, the sea we watch on the screen bears the informing mark, set down on film by light received into the camera, of the sea's actual appearance. Even though Bazin neglected the contrivance that comes into play, he wasn't wrong to feel that in the camera's pictures a reality stemming from the depicted things themselves is preserved. On the strip of film running through the projector, something of the sea itself remains that makes for a peculiarly convincing representation.

There is reality in the film image, but reality at a remove. While the reality contributes impact and conviction, it's the remove that allows form and meaning to work their artifice on the things represented: it's because on film the sea becomes something other than itself, apart from the tangle of actual experience, that it can be arranged into a structure, a theme, a figure of expression. Eisenstein has related how, during his theatrical apprenticeship, he attempted to stage a play in an actual factory, only to find the play overwhelmed by a factory

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present in full force before the spectators—and to decide that cinema would be the medium for him. He proceeded to make *Strike*, perhaps the most remarkable debut in film history (and arguably his best work); this time, meeting reality not on its own ground but at the remove of images bearing its imprint, he was able to master the setting of an actual factory as well as various others among the unwieldy presences of the material world. Facts have no meaning unless they're made into signs: a physicist does that when he applies a theory to guide and to interpret his observations. Engendered out of observed appearances but distinct from them, the film image makes facts into signs, turns the immediate world into a realm amenable to the constructs of signification. Eisenstein's montage constructs, relentless in the endeavor to invest things with meaning, have come in for criticism. "Things are there, why manipulate them?" Thus the neo-realist Rossellini declared his humility before the world's situations, his "faith in reality," as Bazin approvingly called such an attitude, opposing it to a reliance on the image and its artifice. But a filmmaker, respect though he may the facts before his camera, must rely on the image, on the artifice of his craft, in order to express any sort of attitude, including a humble respect for things as they are. Much though it may profit from the camera's directness, a film could express nothing, signify nothing, except for the distance that separates it from immediate experience, the remove that enables the arranging hand of meaning to put together articulate forms.

Reality on film is always at a remove, but to a greater or lesser degree, and with a different quality of impact, depending on the way it's treated. In the usual treatment, an actual place is relegated, like the White House behind the television reporter, to the function of a signpost for itself, a signpost adorned with camera naturalism to lend the proceedings a semblance of actuality. As scenes on location are done most of the time, the locations, though real, make no real difference. A typical scene will start by giving us, in a long shot or two, a brief introduction to the place; then, getting down to the point, a succession of closer views, dimming the place into a background little different from stage scenery, will concentrate our attention on the actors and their dramatic business, their facial expressions, lines of dialogue or pregnant pauses, exchange of loving

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glances or violent blows; after which, for conclusion, there will be another long shot or two, in case we've forgotten this is supposed to be the real world. Treated like a set, the place virtually becomes one on the screen, its actuality thinned into a naturalistic veneer, its role strictly subordinate to the actors and the dramatic fiction. Just as the reporter's words do in a newscast, so in most films the dramatic fiction carries the meaning; and like those words, that fiction, as usually conceived and enacted, means the same thing on location that it would in a studio.

Instead of doing a scene on location, Hollywood in the old days would regularly employ, as a shorthand metonymy, stock footage of the locale—the Eiffel Tower, palm trees by the sea, that sort of thing—and then go on to a studio enactment, often with the assistance of additional metonymical footage in the form of back projection. Although widely accepted at the time, such practices are no longer viable with audiences whose suspension of disbelief requires a stronger dose of "realism." Audiences nowadays will promptly detect and look askance at the fakery of back projection: the actors pretending to be out there in actual terrain, riding in a car along city streets or in a stagecoach across a Western wilderness, without their having in fact left the studio, where some footage of streets or wilderness was projected behind them. Surely this fakery didn't pass undetected in the old days, however: it was accepted, as a convention, by audiences who went to the movies for the actors and the story and were content to have back-projected footage standing in for the place. We mustn't condescendingly think that those audiences knew no better; as can be seen from the hilarious parody in W. C. Fields's 1933 *Fatal Glass of Beer*, they weren't fooled by back projection; better probably than audiences who want more "realism," they knew what movies, then and now, are predominantly about. Then and now, whether faked with back projection or shot on location, the place will in most cases count for little—even if now audiences expect the slicker veneer of actuality that shooting on location provides. Reality is as commonly attenuated, and as rarely confronted, in films now as it was then.

The call to confront it, however, has recurred throughout the history of cinema. To take the camera out into the streets,

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immerse it in the world's substance, has been a vitalizing impulse, at different times and places since the Lumière beginnings, for such various filmmakers as Eisenstein and Rossellini, Dovzhenko and Satyajit Ray, Buster Keaton and Kurosawa, Renoir and Antonioni and Godard. Not satisfied with a veneer, these artists have sought from reality something richer and stranger, of more potency and consequence—but also, just in that measure, harder to deal with coherently, more resistant to articulate arrangement. For there lies the problem reality poses to the filmmaker seriously aiming to engage it: although the remove of film images renders it easier to handle, still, the closer the engagement with its materials, the more difficult the task of bringing them under the control of form and meaning. By keeping them at a far enough remove, incoherence may be avoided, but so will any genuine engagement: this entails taking the risk of incoherence, contending with unruly reality on a ground close enough to its own for its energies and its resistance to come into play. Only by meeting its resistance can a filmmaker derive from its energies, and arrange into expressive structures, a vividness and force that tell on the screen.

Rossellini, who worked close to the rough face of reality, offers a good example of the problem it poses. Aptly described by one critic (Pauline Kael, in conversation) as "a great filmmaker who never made a great film," he commendably grappled with the problem, and prepared the way for others like Antonioni and Godard, but more often than not failed to solve it. In *Rome, Open City*, certain passages impressively evoke the texture of real life in German-occupied Rome, but these passages stand apart from the rest, being ill matched with the stage Nazis and unconvincing turns of plot to which Rossellini resorts; the whole lacks a structure adequate to contain the intensity of the best parts. Rossellini did better in *Germany Year Zero*, also a rather clumsy film, with its share of unconvincing moments, and yet one that stays in the memory not just in bits and pieces but as a sustained whole. For he succeeded this time in devising an action so appropriate to the concrete setting that it seems to come into being from the very ruin and rubble of postwar Berlin; and when the boy protagonist, having killed his ailing father out of a misguided sense of duty, throws himself from one of the half-destroyed buildings down to his death

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amid the rubble, the raw power of graphically presented devastation has been transmuted into the enduring power of tragedy. This boy is a tragic hero of a kind foreign to the theater, because he exists as a character only in relation to the observed particulars of an actual environment; it's in relation to him, however, to the action having him at its center, that the particulars of Rossellini's film are aligned into meaning and made to embody a general statement.

By contrast, the portrayal of the boy in de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, though affectingly done and smoothly combined with the neo-realistic Roman streets, tends to fall back on tried theatrical procedure, and so to recede from the reality of those streets. No film of Rossellini's is as polished as *Bicycle Thieves* or *Umberto D.*, but de Sica took smaller risks, and few things in his work (the morning scene with the maid in *Umberto D.* is one, an unassuming and at the same time startling look at everyday life that is a high point of neo-realism) attain the freshness of perception one encounters in Rossellini at his best. *Bicycle Thieves* has the structure (as Eric Rhode has noted) of a well-made play; one can imagine it done in the theater, with a loss of local color but to no great detriment. *Germany Year Zero* is impossible to conceive apart from the specific detail and circumstance of its setting; its structure may be likened to a piece of architecture built in intimate accordance with the site. The neatly prearranged dramaturgy of de Sica's film bypasses rather than solves the problem of giving form and meaning to reality's recalcitrant materials. Despite his frequent awkwardness, Rossellini is the more important, more searching filmmaker, the truer new realist. Not, it should be stressed, because he did away with artifice to let reality somehow speak for itself: when he succeeded, it was by deploying artifice in keen response to a concrete situation; and when he failed, it was for want of the kind of artifice he would have needed in his dealings with actual things.

Unlike such settings as postwar Berlin or German-occupied Rome, charged with the grief of history, a natural landscape may seem submissive to a filmmaker's constructs, a setting he can manage without much problem. Yet landscape has its own demands and its own ways of resisting an attempt to press it

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into unwarranted service. Although generous with appearances in the role of scenery, tolerant of prettification and sentimentalization—doubtless out of indifference to such petty concerns—landscape will seldom countenance an importunate display of its features in support of an undeserving story or scheme. An agreeable background performer, when brought forward it will assert, and require that the filmmaker do justice to, its intrinsic character, its compound of geological properties and associations with humanity. The landscape of the dust bowl is the protagonist of Pare Lorentz's Depression documentary, *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, and it does not go along with his crude rhetoric; when, in a retrospective segment, he would have it impersonate itself as it was in former, prosperous times, it calls forth our knowledge of its actual sorry state and punctures that fiction. Landscape is more accommodating toward the fictions of its past enacted in Westerns, which have developed with it a long relationship; but a Western must negotiate new terms when venturing beyond the bounds of the genre. Easily as landscape yields its vistas to the camera, any substantial support it will give to a film's undertaking must be earned.

If previous ages looked to Giorgione or Claude, our version of pastoral landscape was painted by the Impressionists. True, that version is over a hundred years old by now, but nobody has painted a newer one to replace it, and when we look at the country through the city eyes of pastoral, which see in it an idealized sweetness and peace, it's still an Impressionist picture that we tend to see. About halfway along those hundred years, in 1936, Jean Renoir made *A Day in the Country*, a forty-minute film set in the Impressionist period in a countryside that Auguste Renoir painted, and evoking the Impressionist pastoral in all its enduring appeal.

Not only in this film, but here especially, Jean Renoir puts one in mind of his father's remark: "In landscape painting I like pictures which make me want to wander about inside them." In Impressionist painting generally, the picture, rather than seeming contained within the frame, enclosed by it, gives us the feeling of an open field where we can imagine wandering about, inside and outside the boundaries of our view. Much of the charm of Impressionist landscape comes from that feeling,

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that invitation to explore in our minds a countryside lushly depicted in paint. Although in movies a space off screen is always implied—it's part of their language to place the seen in a context of the unseen—the frame nonetheless conventionally functions in them as a boundary mark enclosing the pertinent thing, that which we should be seeing at the moment. Rarely have the movies moved, the camera and its subjects wandered about, with the openness of Jean Renoir's work of the thirties; in his different medium, he accomplished a liberation from the conventional enclosures similar to that of his father and the other Impressionists. In a Renoir film, as Bazin wrote, "the action is not bounded by the screen, but merely passes through it."[1] Just because Jean, who needs no prestige by association, has been likened to Auguste perhaps too often, and usually for cursory reasons, one shouldn't disregard the artistic kinship between son and father. Referring to the father's work both generally and specifically—the period, the ambiance, the image of a young woman on a swing—*A Day in the Country* evidently encourages the comparison.

Still more than the similarities, however, this film brings out the differences between the two Renoirs. It employs the period setting not so much to recapture the Impressionists as to bracket them in their own time, to help put them at a distance from which it examines their vision in a spirit at once affectionate and critical. It employs the Auguste Renoir countryside not so much to recall his painting as to measure it against reality, to assess the discrepancy between his pictures, or any picture, and an actual stretch of land where human beings make their place even if only, like the bourgeois family in this film, for the span of a lazy summer afternoon. The Impressionists, one might say, gave us a pastoral of the lazy summer afternoon, a version in keeping with the bourgeois conception of the country as a place to relax on a Sunday outing. Whereas earlier painting was more concerned with the corporeal, the tactile, Impressionist painting represented nature almost purely as a sight, a colorful delight of light: a pastoral for the eyes alone, suggesting no activity other than watching. In

[1] André Bazin, *Jean Renoir*, trans. by *W. W. Halsey II* and *W. H. Simon* (New York, 1973), p. 89.

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calling forth the landscape of Impressionism, Jean Renoir gives us not exactly a pastoral but a film about pastoral.

Maybe the film, which like any bourgeois day in the country was planned for sunny weather, would have been closer to the idyllic had the weather complied. But one could never predict the course of a Renoir film from its script, for he preferred to work in the thick of concrete things, responding to their particularity rather than attempting to stick to plan. And so, with no loss of control, he made a partly cloudy, sometimes sunny, climactically rainy film.

At the beginning, as the bourgeois Parisians on their Sunday outing approach a country inn that seems to them a perfect spot for lunch—lunch to be had on the grass, needless to say—there is a lovely, lyrical traveling shot showing the inn and its surroundings, the trees flowing by with a caress, from the arriving family's collective point of view. This first impression of the place feels indeed like an Impressionist picture, the sensuous camera movement providing a sort of equivalent, in black-and-white film, for the bright Impressionist palette. No less than his father would have on canvas, Renoir celebrates this first impression, relishes this prolonged moment when nature seems to extend us an embrace. His chief means of celebration, however, is a camera movement that also expresses a feeling of impermanence, flux; and he attributes the view to the bourgeois visitors, which does not deny its validity but does signal its one-sidedness.

Certainly Renoir implicates himself, and seeks to implicate us, in the bourgeois family's point of view. The family members—father and mother, daughter and fiancé, grandmother—are as yet scarcely individualized into characters distinct from us, characters with whom we may identify ourselves but whose feelings, even so, are separable from ours; the camera movement proceeds without any inserted shots of their reactions to the scene such as conventionally accompany a point-of-view shot through a character's eyes and enforce its attribution to that character's angle of vision. Here the attribution is kept rather loose, and that family's perspective on the inn might belong just as well to any bourgeois visitor, might have been ours if we had been there, arriving for a *déjeuner sur l'herbe* at that pretty country spot. Collective beyond a whole family, the

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point of view is in effect that of a whole class; but it is nonetheless, Renoir wants us to recognize—even as we join in it, join him in relishing the sights of that arrival—only one way of looking at things. This he makes further manifest when, still without having given us a closer view of the Parisians, he strikingly switches perspective by cutting inside the inn to a shot looking out through its door, the country people's reverse angle, one might call it, a reverse angle not attributed to anyone in particular but, like the angle it responds to, construed collectively. From a visitor's perspective the film switches to an insider's, from one side of things to quite another.

Inside is of course where the country people eat, lunch on the grass being a Parisian penchant on which they comment scornfully. As two local young men are sitting at table, however, one of them opens a window that lets in, with a sudden brightness, another lovely Impressionist picture of the outdoors. Derisive though the country people are about the Parisian pastoral, surely, we feel, nobody could resist the charm of that light and air, that view of the visiting mother and daughter on swings, pouring in through the open window. But the two men have different reactions, one leaning out to watch, the other hardly taking a glance outside; and the window frame intrudes to remind us that the alluring sight within its edges is after all only a picture: literally a picture for us in the audience and for the two men only a spectacle with which they've made no real connection.

For our first close look at any of the visitors, Renoir singles out the daughter, whom we see swinging on her swing, exulting in the open air, the camera empathetically following from a low angle that enhances our sense of her soaring. Further adding to the rapturous sense, the following of her motion isn't quite steady, so that, while she remains continuously in view, her position on the screen changes around as if partaking of her excitement. Like the brushstrokes in Impressionist painting, and like much else in Renoir's film technique, this unsteady following may be thought coarse, an unseemly showing of the artist's hand, by received standards of polish, to which in truth it is a considered alternative, capable of nuance and elegance as well as expressive force.

The daughter on her swing is the centerpiece of the sequence

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beginning with the window being opened: opened as she is open to the sensation of the outdoors, the feel of the trees and the country air. As, swinging, she sweetly yields to nature's embrace, Renoir shows her from a variety of perspectives: from below, and also from eye level and from above; from close, and also in long shots taken from different sides; from close, with the camera now moving along with her, now stationary as she swings toward it and swings back. Besides the two men at the window, she attracts other onlookers—boys gazing over a wall, a group of seminarians walking by—and, irrespective of any particular onlooker, we feel her joy radiating in all directions, she being, from every angle, a joy to watch. But by the same token, we may reflect, she leaves herself vulnerable from every angle in her ingenuous surrender to a pastoral ideal of communion with nature. The multiplicity of angles moreover suggests that there are many ways in which to regard her, many paths she could follow in attempting to relate to her surroundings after she gets down from the air. There are the two different ways personified by the men at the window: Rodolphe, who watches intently, regards her with the cynical delight of a seducer planning to take advantage of her susceptibility to the country ambiance; Henri, more serious-minded, thinks his friend irresponsible and asks him to consider what would happen if she should fall in love with a casual seducer. But Henri isn't averse to seducing the mother, and agrees to join his friend in a pursuit of the two women, a pursuit in which, as things develop, Henri ends up being the one who seduces the daughter, and she falling in love with him.

When the daughter gets down from her swing, Renoir shows her again through the window, our view of her again bordered by the window frame. Not merely a reiteration of the initial view, this return to it deepens its implications, for the reminder that we're watching a picture now extends to the entire swing sequence. The entire sequence, with all the diverse angles it comprises, Renoir now leads us to see as framed by that window—hence all as pictures, not only for us, but also for the characters, who at this point deal mostly in semblances, ways of picturing. As the daughter is only a spectacle for the various onlookers, so does her joy, real though it is, stem mostly from her picture of nature and of herself in nature: figuratively as

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well as literally, she's up in the air, not on any solid ground. Later on, when Rodolphe and Henri, their seduction plans progressing, are about to go on boat rides with the mother and daughter, Renoir holds a shot in which, as the characters talk and then wander off into the distance, the two swings, with nobody on them now, appear all the while in front, gently swaying in opposite directions, slowly coming to a halt. With a delicate evocative power difficult to account for properly, this shot announces the impending coming down to earth of first impressions: just as, by a law of nature, the swings slow down, so the hopes and exhilarations of the air are inevitably to meet the ground of reality.

Like other Renoir films of the thirties—*Boudu Saved from Drowning*, for example, or *The Crime of M. Lange*—*A Day in the Country* pointedly mixes different styles of acting. At one extreme we have the daughter's fiancé and the father, both portrayed farcically, one thin and pale, the other rotund, Laurel and Hardy roaming the Auguste Renoir countryside. At the other extreme, sharing the same universe with these figures of farce, are Henri and the daughter, touching, almost tragic figures, portrayed naturalistically. Although he falls in love with her as she with him on that casually fateful Sunday afternoon, this doesn't prevent her going on to marry her preposterous fiancé: these are a Romeo and Juliet foiled by the Laurel and Hardy.

Somewhere in between, comically exaggerated but not purely farcical, touching in their way but without tragic gravity, are Rodolphe and the mother, who perform a parody of a classical pastoral seduction in the woods, Rodolphe impersonating a satyr and the mother playing along as a matronly nymph. This pastoral parody is intercut with Henri and the daughter's earnest romance, the comical and the serious contrapuntally brought together for a richer apprehension of both these versions of pastoral being enacted in the same Sunday countryside. Rather than a simple contrast, Renoir proposes a reflective comparison between two couples that, each coloring our impression of the other, are surely different yet also alike. The daughter is earnest, the mother playful, but isn't the one's palpitant sensitivity to a nightingale's song comparable to the other's giggling delight in a nymph's role? Henri is sentimental,

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Rodolphe contriving, but doesn't the one behave as irresponsibly with an ingenuous young woman as he thought the other would have? Isn't the pastoral ideal, for both couples, equally remote from reality? If a single mode were to represent both situations, wouldn't parody, rather than naturalism, give the truer picture of both? In Renoir's contrapuntal arrangement, the two seductions, with their different tones calling for different responses, lead us into an inquiring comparative response.

Brecht has been much discussed in connection with films, but seldom in connection with Renoir. Yet the playwright famous for his "alienation effect" and the filmmaker celebrated for his humane sympathy (aside from the fact that they were friends) shared important artistic concerns. In their work they both endeavored, each in his own medium and with his own outlook, toward what Brecht called "complex seeing": not a single focus but an eye-opening manifoldness, a putting forward of diverse aspects, discrepant perspectives, so as to invite from the audience active reflection rather than mere acquiescence. Mixing modes—styles of acting, uses of language, approaches to visual presentation, kinds of fiction—was for both Brecht and Renoir a principal method by which to achieve complex seeing. Breaking the consistency of any one mode they might have asked us to accept, they encourage us, instead, to compare this style of acting with that, that kind of fiction with this, this with that way of doing things, of regarding things. Such a mixture is difficult to bring off; it's always easier to maintain consistency than successfully to manage diversity. *A Day in the Country* succeeds so well, with so little apparent effort, that to inattentive watchers it has seemed a simple small picture, Renoir and his actors on a Sunday outing themselves. The film is simple only in its plot, small only in its short running time, effortless only because of its consummate technique. Its complexity is not in the tale but in the telling—in the seeing.

Deftly balancing naturalism and farce, parody and tragedy, the film allows us no settled response; neither a serious drama with comic relief nor a comedy with serious touches, it asks that we entertain the serious and the comical on equal terms and generates between the two a continual give and take. Of the parallel seductions one may say, after Marx, that what occurs

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the first time as tragedy, in the daughter's youth, occurs the second, in the mother's middle age, as farce; and Renoir, setting the farce and the tragedy side by side, insists that we keep both in mind together. He establishes a similar give and take in the later *Rules of the Game*, a tragedy cast in the form of a comedy, a film where nothing serious is not also comical and nothing comical not also serious; even at the somber end, the pilot's death comes about through the mistaken identities, and brings on the reconciliation of couples, the final restoration of order, traditionally found in comedy. In *A Day in the Country* the different modes are kept more separate, not so much mingled as juxtaposed. The daughter and her fiancé, she a wholly serious character, he a farcical fool, make the film's most incongruous juxtaposition, whose full impact is saved for the end, when we see the two married and realize with a shock that his farce is her tragedy.

No mode of fiction being dominant, each one held in restraint by another alongside, the film instead gives primacy to the landscape, the constant ground on which the fiction sketches its variable figures. Although Renoir was adapting a story from Maupassant, the film he made conveys the feeling that for him the landscape came first, that he reversed the usual procedure of starting with a story and then hunting for suitable locations: in his film the landscape is a sovereign presence, the fiction a tentative undertaking, a foray in quest of meaning. What sort of fiction shall be enacted here? the film inquires through its mixture of modes, and with this it raises another issue, large and troublesome: how shall we relate to nature? Each mode of fiction proposes a different relation; none holds a secure claim on a landscape that Renoir leads us to regard as independent from any way of regarding it, from any pictures we may paint, dramas we may enact, films we may make—including this one we're watching. Whereas most films put their settings at the service of fiction, in this case the landscape puts the fictional venture to the test. Renoir makes fiction into a trope for the human attempt to connect with nature, endow it with meaning, feel at home in it or at least feel welcome in our brief visit.

When Henri and the daughter go off together on their boat ride, Renoir's camera proceeds with them along the river and,

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seemingly from their rowboat—slow-moving, gently rocking—beholds each shore in extended traveling shots vibrant with the complexion and quiver of summery nature. These shots suggest the daughter's point of view from the boat (perhaps also Henri's, though he's rowing and less inclined anyhow toward gazing admiringly at the countryside); the mood evoked leaves small doubt that she'll soon yield to Henri's advances, which have great help from nature's foreplay. But, as in the arrival at the country inn, Renoir's camera here, while adopting the position of traveling in the same vehicle as the characters, travels uninterrupted by any inserted shots of their glances or reactions, so that the attribution of point of view is deliberately not enforced: this may be the daughter's perspective, but it's not primarily through her, through the fictional situation, that we're being asked to respond. Inserted glances and reactions are a means, which normally would have been employed here, of assimilating a setting to the fiction, making us see it in the fiction's terms—as the characters see it, as it pertains to them and their situation and only to that—but Renoir grants the fiction no prerogative to dictate terms.

Freeing the landscape from the dominance of fiction, Renoir at the same time frees the camera from its customary role as agent of that dominance, provider of views and perspectives that center on the characters and impose the priorities of the plot. Whereas the camera in most films takes its prompting from the dramatic fiction, Renoir establishes his camera, in this film and elsewhere, as an autonomous narrative agency that conducts its own transaction with the world. Standard point-of-view shots, which give the camera over to a character's fictional eyes, he generally avoids; he often employs, however, what may be called the loosely attributed point of view, which proposes, not an equation, but varying degrees of correspondence between the camera's perspective and a character's. Renoir deserves his reputation for sympathy; his autonomous camera—and this registers as a choice, a well-felt gesture, rather than a dramatic necessity—remains attentive to the characters, in tune with their perceptions and sentiments; but his is a sympathy combined with an inquiring detachment. He wants us to feel with the daughter on that boat ride—the point of view, if not quite hers, is not quite apart from hers either—

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but he also encourages us to keep our distance from her so that we may look at things with our own eyes. As his camera takes a path of its own, so, rather than simply deriving a vicarious response from the dramatic fiction, we are to consider our own response, the ways we have of relating to that landscape in particular and to nature in general, keeping aware of the fact that we aren't, after all, in the same boat as the characters.

In the aftermath of the two seductions, right after the daughter has yielded to Henri with passion and tears, Renoir switches away from the characters altogether. The views of unpeopled nature that follow might be taken for an instance of the pathetic fallacy, the daughter's feelings projected onto the wind-blown plants and dark clouds of a gathering rainstorm, the tension before the storm and the release when rain falls meant to stand for (in Alexander Sesonske's plausible interpretation[2]) the sexual emotions she's experiencing. But Renoir hasn't built his film around her; to stay within the fiction's orbit, three other characters, each with emotions not to be discounted, are engaged in sex at the same time as she. More important, as the rain breaks and the camera retreats down the river, this sequence continues and concludes without people: the time that passes without even a glimpse of the characters works to dispel any direct associations we may entertain between their feelings and nature. This isn't a case, either, of nature presented as grandly impervious to the concerns of humanity (as in, say, Werner Herzog's Amazon films); to see nature as uncaring is but another form of the pathetic fallacy, to see it as meaningless but another way of assigning it a precise meaning. Renoir allows nature to become neither too closely associated with the characters nor too far dissociated from them and the human standpoint they represent.

But the human standpoint, as Renoir here and elsewhere insists on reminding us, is no fixed universal thing. It varies greatly according to the individual, the society, the walk of life, the time and place. It always differs between a spectator or reader, situated outside, and a character inside a work's proposed world. Renoir brings forward this difference dividing us

[2] Alexander Sesonske, *Jean Renoir: The French Films, 1924–1939* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p. 252.

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from the characters—rather than induce in us an identification that would dissemble it—as well as the differences dividing the characters themselves. Despite the moment of love that Henri and the daughter share, his feelings and hers are not truly at one; the two part ways after their encounter, not to meet again until years have sealed their mutual isolation and her unhappy marriage to the fiancé. Rodolphe and the mother may be better matched in their parallel encounter, though that would be only because neither of the two harbors any notion of oneness. Among these four individuals sexually engaged in the midst of nature's embrace, feelings and attitudes are split four ways. "Everybody has his reasons" is the line most often quoted from Renoir. Those who construe it as an encapsulation of his warm acceptance of humanity usually forget that, when Octave utters it in *Rules of the Game*, he prefaces it by saying that "on this earth" this is the "one thing that is terrible."

Without hurry, dwelling on nature's verdant sights, *A Day in the Country* has moved toward the momentary communion of the parallel sexual encounters; no sooner are they over than, briskly, at an increasing pace, in three successive shots that are the film's most assertive visual maneuver, the camera travels backward as the country excursion comes to an abrupt rainy end. A meandering, exploratory progression is suddenly broken, reversed, by this decisive traveling "over the rapidly receding face of the river," as Sesonske writes, "pierced by the myriad needles of the rain": unpeopled images of irrevocable retreat, reverberating with a sense of loss, separation, communion fleetingly achieved and now swiftly, in a few moments that seem to comprise a lifetime, left behind. Not only the speed and direction, the time scale is switched here in one bold stroke: from the scale of a day, a few hours lingered over, suspended in sensual apprehension, to a few moments whose movement evokes the rush of years ceaselessly passing.

Autonomous but not godlike, declining to assume a superior point of vantage, Renoir's camera meets the world from a position that is always recognizably concrete, on a human plane. If it traveled up river in a rowboat, it backs away down river—as becomes significant because we register its concrete position in both cases—with the speed of a motorboat, a vehicle in which the nineteenth-century characters couldn't have been traveling.

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Although the vehicle isn't shown, the departing backward views were evidently taken from an unsteady small boat, which could be the same one as traveled up river and in which we can imagine ourselves riding on a Sunday and hurrying back when it starts to rain, but whose propelling drive in the retreat would have been unavailable to the characters. This rapid motion, especially in comparison with the leisurely progress up river, makes us note a speed beyond mere rowing, a plane of human experience attainable only since the advent of motorboats and cameras endowed with mobility to match that of an age just being born when the Impressionists were painting. At the close of an excursion it has made its own—and ours—Renoir's camera detaches itself not only from the characters but from the whole period of the fiction: its departing motion belongs unmistakably to our century. The sense of years passing, a long span compressed into those retreating moments, extends from the characters' lives to the lives of all of us, in all the years that have passed since that time of Impressionist picnics on the grass and virginal daughters tremulously surrendering to love by the waterside. It's as if the day in the country, having begun in the nineteenth century, were ending in the twentieth: as if that river we're leaving behind were the last version of pastoral receding from our twentieth-century motorboat. Incitingly, Renoir omits the characters from this visual cadence that, no mere ornament to the story, is the film's culminant sequence, rich in associations with them but essentially addressing us, drawing us into a reflective look at things from where we stand outside the fiction.

It is a backward look, literally at the receding river, figuratively at the moments, the days, the years, of time passing and time past. A longing for things gone is expressed, but here this does not, as typically it does in pastoral, diminish our apprehension of the present. The backward looks of traditional pastoral long for a golden age that never existed; the Impressionist version, even as it seizes on a sensory presentness, longs for the golden moments of that presentness now become pastness, flashes of communion with nature that it sustains by dint of paint. In either case the longing takes over, the proposed golden times dim the supposed fallen times of present reality. In *A Day in the Country* the longing for the past

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is, like a backward look from a motorboat, but one perspective, one way among others of regarding the landscape of the present.

Besides picturing a dramatic fiction enacted before it, the movie camera enacts the fiction of a perceiving eye, an apprehending consciousness. The dramatic fiction imitates an action; the camera imitates a gaze, a point of view, an act of perception and of consciousness. The movies are a representation both of the world and of an apprehension of the world. But usually the camera, made subservient to the dramatic fiction, does little more than unfold the plot, the characters' actions and perceptions and the pertinent attendant circumstances: caught up in the movement of plot, we scarcely register the camera's point of view, the choice to look at things in this manner and succession, as a directed act of consciousness, a movement of mind. Imagine a shot that, in conventional fashion, presents something dramatically significant from a suitable angle and distance; then imagine that shot held for a moment longer than necessary to make the dramatic point: that extra moment, such as we're usually denied, would arrest the movement of plot long enough for us to gain the sense of an apprehending mind behind the camera. Renoir often gives us such extra moments, either after or before the dramatically significant thing, to which he characteristically pays no privileged attention. His camera, with its distinctive autonomous gaze, everywhere enacts an unmistakable movement of consciousness.

In *A Day in the Country* the dramatic fiction, which in most films determines the point of view and the meaning, provisionally advances different ways of seeing that, conjointly with the camera's ways, partake in a complex apprehension of a landscape that holds the promise of pastoral but is seen to conform to no settled way of seeing it or assigning it meaning. The film's movement of consciousness begins with the arriving perspective of a generalized visitor seeking immersion in nature for a pastoral day. A discrepancy in points of view then starts to become manifest, a discrepancy not only between the visitors and the locals but also among the various individuals, their differences accentuated by the different acting styles; and moreover a discrepancy between the point of view of the

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characters and the perspectives successively adopted by the camera. These discrepant, conflicting ways of seeing run counter to the pastoral promise of a regained oneness with nature: we're made aware of a separation between nature and the consciousness that apprehends it and attempts to invest it with meaning, between a landscape that can be regarded from many different perspectives and the different perspectives from which we may regard it. Although a film can offer us, not nature, but only its representation in necessarily reductive images, usually it will promote the impression that the images represent nature, capture it, with perfect adequacy. Nature in *A Day in the Country* is represented with rich vividness yet perceived to be abundantly in excess of its representation: in excess of our consciousness, of the mind's capacity to apprehend it with any conclusive adequacy. The rainstorm strikingly frustrates pastoral expectations, not only for the day but for the years that seem to be swiftly passing, and not only for the characters but for all of us who joined them in the sunny arrival and now look upon stormy nature from the departing perspective of a visitor no longer identifiable with them, generalized beyond their circumstances and their century. That uncannily rapid departing motion of the camera—rapid like our passage through this world where we're all mere visitors—evokes the movement of a consciousness that recognizes its own foreignness amid the trees and the river and the rain, its own irremediable separation from the things of nature.

Is this an "eternal separation," as Paul de Man maintains, a problem inherent in "the contradictory relations between natural being and the being of consciousness"?[3] Or is it, as a Marxist would argue, not an ontological but a cultural, socially induced separation, a problem not of being but of history? In the thirties, from *La Chienne* at the decade's outset to *The Rules of the Game* at its end—a period when he took a political position aligned with the left—Jean Renoir was the least abstract of

[3] I quote from "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism," where, mainly in connection with Empson, de Man gives a concise and thought-provoking discussion—insightful if partially blind—of nature, consciousness, pastoral, Marxism, and poetry. See Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis, 1983), pp. 235–241. See also William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), especially the chapters on "Proletarian Literature" and "Marvell's Garden."

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filmmakers, keenly in touch with the specifics of culture and society, time and place, the concrete historical circumstances under which human beings lead their lives (and make and experience their art). Rather than concocting some fancied timeless pastoral, *A Day in the Country* deals specifically with the bourgeois pastoral of the Sunday outing pictured though largely not explicit in Impressionist painting; and rather than aiming to spellbind some supposed universal audience, it encourages self-awareness in its actual viewers and invites them to consider their own historical situation. And yet, with a generality lent more import and resonance by this very specificity, the film ponders the question of our relation to nature, the problem of our separation from it: a question and a problem that, if historical, surely have a long history. Even the sweetly radical *Crime of Monsieur Lange* of 1935, among Renoir's films (aside from *La Vie est à nous*, made for the French Communist Party in 1936) the most enthusiastic in behalf of socialism, presents the socialist solution as a wonderful but improbable and precarious cooperative of workers, a cherished dream of surmounted alienation and warm community that would be difficult to attain, the film acknowledges, and still more difficult to sustain. The circle that stands for community, in the film's expressive geometric symbolism, is at the end broken by a straight line traced by footsteps across a frontier. That same year, another man of the left, William Empson, put forward the view that Marxist thought, in its reaching for oneness, is a version of pastoral thought. Renoir was no more sentimental about a pastoral after the revolution than about one before the fall.

An unstressed yet breathtaking sequence from *La Chienne* begins with the main character, a bashful middle-aged cashier named Legrand, lathering his face for shaving by a window open onto a courtyard, and on the point of stealing some money from his domineering wife for the sake of his young mistress. The sound of a piano is heard, coming from somewhere nearby. This isn't conventional, disembodied background music: sound in *La Chienne*, as was Renoir's practice in the early thirties, always comes from a revealed source within the world of the film, and on this piano we hear a beginner playing exercises, though we are yet to see it and its player. In

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one uninterrupted take, casual in its manner yet unerring in its execution, the camera follows Legrand as he silently, furtively moves toward the linen cabinet where his wife keeps her savings, and as, the theft accomplished, he moves back to the window and happily resumes shaving. On returning to the window, the camera looks out, as if by happenstance, from a somewhat different angle that allows us to see into another window across the courtyard, and after a slight adjustment of focus, through this other window we finally observe—independently of Legrand, who isn't looking in this direction but at his own face in his shaving mirror—a little girl playing the piano we've been hearing all along. Our seeing this little girl, who has no dramatic role in the film, evidently a neighbor to whom Legrand pays no mind and whom we just glimpse, is a curiously affecting and gladdening revelation.

For the most part in counterpoint, then finally in unison, this sequence sets up a telling interplay between image and sound. It conveys the excitement of trying out what was at the time a new technique, sound, which Renoir welcomed and which enabled his flourishing as a major artist: sound no longer separately played, in the fashion of silent cinema, but incorporated into film. Like a piano player at a silent movie, the little girl provides a musical accompaniment to Legrand's silent theft, but we feel her presence in his vicinity, not in ours, and the camera, in the course of following him, ends up finding her, and integrating the sound of her piano with her image playing it. As the sound testifies, she is there, and even if she has nothing to do with the plot, we must take account of her. Formally the sequence moves from an unresolved separation to a resolving fusion of image and sound; thematically it suggests the interconnection, and potential coming together in harmony, of such disparate individuals as Legrand and the little girl—or of ourselves and the strangers who are our neighbors in a big city.

Each separately absorbed in his or her own activity, neither Legrand nor the little girl pays any attention to the other, and yet the two are brought conjointly to our attention. Each is inside, in presumed privacy, and yet also by a window open to the outside, to the existence and possible community of others: the camera that follows him and finds her might have equally

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followed her and found him. Their association through form—the musical accompaniment she unknowingly provides for him, the camera movement linking them together in a continuous path of gaze, and joining the image with the sound that has been proof of her existence—disposes us to think of ways in which, without their knowing it, the two may be connected, akin. As the little girl is a beginner at the piano, so is Legrand a beginner, an innocent, at cheating on his wife and stealing from her; as the little girl is an incipient musical artist (the exercises she plays were composed by Leopold Mozart for his son Wolfgang), so, besides a cashier, is Legrand a man of feeling and an uncommonly talented amateur painter; as the little girl's piano lessons will probably amount to no more than a bourgeois pretension, so is Legrand a petit bourgeois pretending to his mistress that he's a successful painter while in fact lacking adequate funds to support her; and so on. Disparate yet interconnected, alienated yet akin, at cross-purposes yet bound up together: thus are the characters in all Renoir films of the thirties. Although the disparateness and the cross-purposes may win out, as grimly happens in *La Chienne*, the sense of interconnection, of kinship and togetherness in spite of alienation, which this sequence summons up with delicate eloquence, nonetheless keeps open other possibilities.

Legrand in *La Chienne* and the daughter in *A Day in the Country* are alike sensitive children of the petite bourgeoisie who erroneously hope for a personal, sentimental escape from the constrictions of their social situation. In the epilogue to *A Day in the Country*, the daughter and Henri, years after their afternoon of romance, meet again in the same pretty spot by the river where they had made love. He alone, she with her farcical husband, the two have gone there independently, both drawn by the pull of sentimental memories of their brief intimacy in nature's midst. This is another Sunday, but the mood now is not summery but autumnal. Arriving with Henri, the camera follows him along the river and, as he notices the daughter and pauses, it swiftly moves on to her and then moves back, following her now as she walks toward him; but this continuous path of gaze, which may be described as a double following and finding, first from his side and then from hers, leads to no togetherness except a shared yearning for what

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might have been. The moving camera traces the form of a coming together, but this gesture of sympathy only underscores the missed togetherness in the lives of these two. Her husband calls out, and Henri withdraws, the camera alongside him as, from a distance, he watches the daughter leaving with her husband, who compounds his ridiculousness with a petty tyrannical manner he apparently believes is the way to treat a wife; then Henri goes over by the river and, leaning on a tree overhanging it, wistfully smokes a cigarette. As he throws away the cigarette, the camera turns in that direction, panning leftward in a movement more or less identified with his glance but interrupted by a striking cut—a cut breaking the conventional rules of smooth editing—to another panning movement, starting again from the tree on which Henri leans but turning rightward this time, and continuing in an unhurried look at the river and its shore. A pan is like a turning of the head, and here the camera's head first turns leftward, in sympathy with Henri, and then rightward, away from him in the direction opposite to his glance. In its rightward panning the camera observes the daughter rowing away with her husband—she doing the rowing—whereupon its gaze moves down to Henri's empty boat by the shore, and on sideways to the unruffled, rippling water. These paired panning shots conclude the film. The cut between them feels like a bouncing back, with the tree as a point of stability, from Henri's melancholy contemplation, which projects onto nature an understandable but fruitless nostalgia, to an open, lingering view of nature's unceasing countenance.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

The Garden

And now they say
Gardens are merely the expression of a class
Masterful enough to enamel away
All signs of the labour that produced them.
This crass reading forgets that imagination
Outgoes itself, outgrows aim
And origin; forgets that art
Does not offer the sweat of parturition
As proof of its sincerity. The guide-book, too,
Dislikes this garden we are descending through
On a wet day in Gloucestershire. It speaks
Accurately enough of windings and of water,
Half-lost pavilion, mossy cascade,
But is afraid 'the style is thin.' One must smile
At the irritability of critics, who
Impotent to produce, secrete over what they see
Their dislike or semi-assent, then blame
The thing they have tamed for being tame.
But today, see only how
Laden in leaves, the branchwork canopy—
Bough on bough, rearing a dense
Mobile architecture—shudders beneath its finery
In cool July. Heat, no doubt,
Would flesh out the secret of this garden where
(Or so it's said) the man who imagined it
Could wind down to find
His gypsy inamorata waiting there
By the hidden lake.
There are three lakes here
And a fluttering curtain of rain that falls
Differently in each. The first
Lies open to the farmland and it takes
The full gust and disordering of the weather

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Across its surface. The second—
  We have descended further now
Bending our way in under each low bough—
  Shelters between the hills' high shoulders,
And so the green, smooth plain of water
  Lies taut under the nail-points of the rain.
We must enter next a key-hole door
  Into darkness: through a rough window-slit
We catch a runnel wrinkling over stone,
  And the pool that stretches to receive it
So fills the aperture we can not take in
  Its true extent: we are all eye—
Which is not eye enough to outdo
  The dark we are trying to gaze out through.
A twist in the tunnel: light! We are delivered
  And now we can freely move
Beneath a pergola 'in the precise arch'
  (I quote to show the disapproval I disapprove)
'Of a railway terminus.' This is no end
  However, but the start of the final lake.
You can see the rain withdraw across
  This widest of the waters, the transparent scrim
Suddenly towed aside, and calm
  Flowing up to its receding hem:
Fish in the cloudy depths might well be swimming
  Through sky such as threatens us still.
We have the hill to re-ascend, and do,
  Up to the formal garden at its summit:
The statuary, the espaliered avenue
  Ignore the twisting path. The descent
To the hidden lake now hoards from sight
  The walks and walls, the subterranean door
Into an imaginary place that time
  Turned real. The imagination hovers here
Half rebuked, with its Doric and Chinese;
  Nor can a planned secretiveness outdo
The cool green of that chamber
  Shut from view beneath the gloom
Of the copper beech. Its tent conceals
  Not darkness, but an inner room,
An emerald cell of leaves whose light

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Seems self-sustaining, and its floor
A ground for the reconciling of our dreams
With what is there.
So here we stand,
We two, and two from another land,
To meditate the gift we did not ask—
The work of seasons and of hands unseen
Tempering time. What has not disappeared
Is a design that grew—ultimately to include
(Besides plants of oriental and American species)
Us four, in its playful image of infinity,
The whole of it assembled with a view
To generations beyond the planter's: there is nothing here
We shall ever own, nothing that he owns now,
In those reflections of summer trees on water,
This composure awaiting the rain and snow.

For a Godchild

Given a godchild,
I must find a god
worthy of her. Dante
refused—in courtesy
(he said) to the god
he venerated, to wipe
a sinner's eyes in hell:
I must tell her of that
one day, and see
that she ponders well
what she takes to be
the dues of deity—
and learn that a god
who harbours anger where
thirst has no slaking,
eyes no ease,
is either of her own
or others' making.

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A Ruskinian Fable Retold: Courtesy

—or however you'd denote
the behaviour of this quartz,
living side by side
with the seemingly more modest
green and slender
mineral called 'epidote':
they can't go on
growing together now
much longer: the quartz
five times as thick
is twenty times the stronger.
Sensing, at the very crown
and self-built summit
of its own existence,
the presence of its weak
persistent neighbour,
it pauses there and lets
the pale-green film
of epidote grow past
to occupy the space
beyond it. The cost
of this well-bred hesitation?
Its own crystal life.
No: 'courtesy'
is not the word: courtesy
is closer to common sense
than immolation.

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Chance

I saw it as driving snow, the spume,
  Then, as the waves hit rock
Foam-motes took off like tiny birds
  Drawn downwind in their thousands
Coiled in its vortices. They settled
  Along ledges and then fell back,
Condensed on the instant at the touch of stone
  And slid off, slicking the rock-sides
As they went. The tide went, too,
  Dragging the clicking pebbles with it
In a cast of chattering dice. What do they tell
  These occurrences, these resemblances that speak to you
With no human voice? What they told then
  Was that the energies pouring through space and time,
Spun into snow-lace, suspended into flight,
  Had waited on our chance appearance here,
To take their measure, to re-murmur in human sounds
  The nearing roar of this story of far beginnings
As it shapes out and resounds itself along the shore.

Chronochromie

The thrushes are singing their morning plainchant,
  Colouring time—rehearsing once again
In flood and droplet, cascade and chime
  Those centuries before our coming here
To measure and to minute out
  All to our purposes. Now we go
Back with the birds to before we were.
  We cannot stay long. Only the angels
Could listen out that song
  Through the millennia of our silence. Yet angels
And other feathered things have in common

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Merely their wings, for thrushes
Both sing and stab. And we alone
Who invented angels, but not the birds,
Hear brink and beginning in their wordless words—
Hear space begetting time once more
In the falls and flourish of that coloratura.

Harvest

After the hay was baled and stacked in henges,
We walked through the circles in the moonlit field:
The moon was hidden from us by the ranges
Of hills that enclosed the meadows hay had filled.

But its light lay one suffusing undertone
That drew out the day and changed the pace of time:
It slowed to the pulse of our passing feet upon
Gleanings the baler had left on the ground to rhyme

With the colour of the silhouettes that arose,
Dark like the guardians of a frontier strayed across,
Into this in-between of time composed—
Sentries of Avalon, these megaliths of grass.

Yet it was time that brought us to this place,
Time that had ripened the grasses harvested here:
Time will tell us tomorrow that we paced
Last night in a field that is no longer there.

And yet it was. And time, the literalist,
The sense and the scent of it woven in time's changes,
Cannot put by that sweetness, that persistence
After the hay was baled and stacked in henges.

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Letter to Uehata

Since I returned, the trees have a Japanese look,
  And bare in their wintry sinuousness seem
To retrace in air the windings of those paths
  That followed so faithfully the swelling ground,
Then lost for an instant, came back into view
  With the trees they wound on through, reflected
(Borrowed, as you would say) by some pool.
  That landscape was arranged—to reflect
And reflect again the grain and grandeur
  Of the world we see, and that the centuries
Have unrolled to now, as if time
  Were itself the paradigm of a path
That has brought me to where I can read
  In the bareness of the trees a double scene—
Where I am now and where we both were then.

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MARK JARMAN

Dressing My Daughters

One girl a full head taller
than the other—into their Sunday dresses.
First, the slip, hardly a piece of fabric,
softly stitched and printed with a bud.
I'm not their mother, and tangle, then untangle
the whole cloth—on backwards, have to grab it
round their necks. But they know how to pull
arms in, a reflex of being dressed,
and also, a child's faith. The mass of stuff
that makes the Sunday frocks collapses
in my hands and finds its shape, only because
they understand the drape of it—
these skinny keys to intricate locks.
The buttons are a problem
for a surgeon. How would she connect
these bony valves and stubborn eyelets?
The filmy dress revolves in my blind fingers.
The slots work one by one.
And when they're put together,
not like puppets or doll-saints
that bring tears to true believers,
but living children, somebody's real daughters,
they do become more real.
They say,"Stop it!" and "Give it back!"
And "I don't want to!" They'll kiss
a doll's hard features, whispering,
"I'm sorry." I know just why my mother
used to worry. Your clothes don't keep
you close—it's nakedness.
Clad in my boots and holster,
I would roam with my six-gun buddies.
We dealt fake death to one another,
fell and rolled in filth and rose,

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grimy with wounds, then headed home.
But Sunday . . . What was that tired explanation
given for wearing clothes that
scratched and shined and weighed like a slow hour?
That we should shine—in gratitude.
So, I give that explanation, undressing them,
and wait for the result.
After a day like Sunday, such a long one,
when they lie down, half-dead,
to be undone, they won't help me.
They cry, "It's not my fault."

The Double Bow

They've taken to stalking back through the failed years
and come again on the trip to Mexico.
They crossed the border in their new Impala,
a family of four relying on
the children's grade school Spanish. Summer
and miles of the Sonora's airtight heat.
The shrimp in Guaymas on a heavy plate.
The burro on the road, its naked ribs
clothed by the wings of buzzards, who jounced aside
to let them pass. Culiacán. The pool,
slick with algae, where water beetles raced
between their thighs. The puddle that they hit,
suspending an umbrella of sheer mud
over a woman on a street corner. At last,
Mazatlán. The Pacific's lukewarm waves.
Heat lightning out at sea. A bumper sticker.
The coast is clear. Nothing they can recall
festers, clouds the view, or points to itself
as the one place where everything went wrong.
The ascent to the interior through black fogs,
out of which buses tore, and blue-gray walls
of dripping rock appeared, facing drop-offs

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that opened over valleys green as jade,
topped with clouds and inner depths of sky.
If they could stop, could stop and float awhile.
But a blunt-faced bus, headed for the future,
bullies them on. In Aguascalientes,
their son or daughter, maybe it was both,
began a week of diarrhea, whining.
San Luis Potosí. Querétaro.
And jewels in the markets, bristling gods
and wheels of shining tin, and children weeping.
Was that it? Or was it, beside a lake
where butterflies of netting were cast out
and drew in delicate white fish at twilight,
they sat down in the quiet restaurant,
the children well and quiet, and they ate?
It couldn't be. But there was still the ring
in Mexico City, sun-half and shade-half
divided by the price, and the bull's neck
draped with blood. And didn't he want to scream,
"Woman!" at the clumsy matador, urging
his son to tell him how to say it, while
she hid her eyes and cupped the boy's mouth shut?
In Guadalajara, what of the great market
where she lost them, looking for paper flowers,
and they wandered for an hour in the stench of—
was it the sliced fruit? The jars of eggs?
The red goat carcasses, hung among flies?
It was so long ago, so much is missing.
They could even take the long trek home again
through all the cities, wearily repeating
what had been strange and new. And yet, remember,
there was the sudden downpour in the desert,
and then the place where all the traffic stopped,
and, arcing over buttes, the double rainbow.
The children were asleep. They woke them up
to see it, and forgot to get the camera.
The rain walked off on legs of light and shadow
below the fading arch, the broken colors.
And then the heat returned, the traffic, driving.

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ROBERT PHILLIPS

Scouting Days

To make a soapbox racing car
no longer was the project:
What father or Cub Scout son
could even find a wooden soapbox
those postmodern days of 1977?

Instead, each boy was handed
a rectangular block of wood
and four plastic axled wheels,
told to return next week
with a completed model rally car.

Fathers were allowed to help.
But the depths of my incompetence,
naivete, were unparalleled.
I hacked and stabbed and chiseled
at that hard block with penknife,

other fathers masterfully power-
sawed, fretsawed, powersanded,
ultra-streamlined, supersmooth.
Ours resisted taking shape,
a jalopy painted by Grandma Moses.

The hoots that greeted him when
he presented the homely thing!
He was unconsoled when, democratic,
the scoutmasters raced it anyway;
downhill, it came in a cool third.

(I'd buried a lead sinker in the nose.)
That qualified it and him to go

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to regional racing competition.
But other fathers said its appearance
would be an embarrassment to The Pack.

The next assignment was to make a kite.
No powertools needed for that. Taking
shelf paper and two wooden sticks
and good horsehoof glue, I made
a kite that flew and flew and flew—

it seemed weightless and designed
to belly big against March skies!
Together we'd painted the sun's
smiling face on its fragile facade,
and it beamed down like a god.

Everyone admired it as it sailed above
the Saturday town, five-foot tail
trailing bows of cellophane. My son
held the line in both small hands
and felt the flailing tug of love.

Walnuts

After she died, Father chainsawed the walnut
tree down. Unharvested nuts leave too much mess
upon the blackened, frozen ground. Till then,
every year, walnuts fell in the back yard,
recalcitrant ones shaken or prodded
from the pronged tree with whip-lash branches.
Their kiwi-green jackets were putty-soft.
Inside, corrugated as testicles,
hard nuts to crack. Father would not assist,
so alone she gathered the baskets full,
carried them to the basement to dry out.
Throughout December the stark hammer blows

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echoing inside the house made us wince—
  Thunk! and Thunk! and Thunk! as she split black nuts
sacrificed upon a cement block. Days
  it took to crack the lot, and then for days
she worked with a nutpick to retrieve the white
  meat from each hull, like flesh from a lobster.
The rooms smelled acrid, sharp—good scent of walnut.
  Finally she showed a Tupperware bowl full.
Christmas, tollhouse cookies, applesauce cake
  blazoned her walnuts. Father ate the most.
Me, she taught the sweet result of labor,
  and the importance of a direct hit.

A Little Elegy for Howard Moss

(1922–1987)

Howard, you died so many different deaths.
Once an ordinary mosquito bite
became, in your eyes, sign of Lyme's Disease
(in the East it was all the rage that year).
An occasional headache? A tumor
big as an avocado on the brain.
Your prickly heat? The beginning of AIDS.
You name it, you thought you had it in spades.

So when you fled your classes at midterm,
left Houston to see your New York internist,
saying, "I feel strange . . .", we said, "That's Howard!"
Except this time, symptoms were genuine.
You had real pneumonia, real phlebitis,
a real spot on your lungs and a real heart
attack that turned you to concrete late one night.
Even hypochondriacs have real illnesses.

I miss your astringent humor, Old Sport,

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your understating every blessed thing
(except your health—one topic was sacred).
And how your mind managed to qualify!
"X is quite masterful in what he does;
but what *is* it he does?" It took the breath.
Now your breath's taken, since last fall shut down.
I still resist the urge to telephone;

that's perhaps the biggest deprivation,
knowing I can't pick up the phone to dish
about this one and that one—real people
the creations that fascinated you most.
Yet for all your knowledge of character,
you seemed unaware of the role you played—
fawning of would-be poet sycophants,
dislike of thousands of rejectees, undiscerned.
Howard, you died not knowing who you were.

Avant-Garde Music Comes to America

(Charles Ives, 1874–1954)

"Bringing in the Sheaves"
  sashaying in counterpoint
to "Turkey in the Straw"?—

Just maybe innovation
  in Yankee music commenced
when George Ives, organist,

cornetist, bandsman, father
  of Charles, fiendishly arranged
one ordinary afternoon

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for two bands to march
  through Danbury, Connecticut,
from opposite directions,

playing different tunes
  in different keys.
Like a town meeting, every man

for himself, "Old Black Joe"
  competing with "Yankee Doodle
Dandy," "Columbia, Gem

of the Ocean" tangling with
  "Where, Oh Where, Are
the Pea-Green Freshmen?"

Brightly blared the brass!
  Tremulous were the reeds!
Raucous rose the chord clusters.

An ear-splitting, contrapuntal
  free-for-all! Dissonance
and cacophony! As sounds

gnashed and clashed,
  townspeople held ears. But
George's son grinned approval . . .

Those polytonal disharmonies,
  those unities of disunities,
were they the start of Charles'

own iconoclastic American music?
  Born in chaos, vitalized
by chaos, out of chaos

rose music of a new order.

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Ghost Story

The one to whom he always felt most close
died, and he could never comprehend why
he felt no loss, no grief, shed not one tear.
He kept her picture close by, a souvenir
of times past, foreign, even a bit quaint.
And years went by and still he felt that way
until one night, a party, she was there
(this was in a dream, but more real than real).
More beautiful than she had been in life,
dressed to the nines, she mingled, made small talk,
and eventually came over to him:
"I've been missing you, every single day,"
she said. His tears released, she went away.

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MICHAEL McFEE

The Picture

I am strapped into stiff lederhosen
sent by an army uncle's mother-in-law,
tied into freshly whited dress shoes,
posed before with the canoe-sized windowbox
lousy with dimestore petunias,
crying:

my earliest memory. And here I am
again, tugging at the foreign leather,
the buckles, the buttons and ornaments
"carved from a wild stag's horn,"
begging the Kodak to look away
please

as I do from the same frayed plot
year after year, in new Easter suits
and caps, in first-day-of-school shoes,
clutching baskets, Bibles, lunchboxes
beside my sister, our eyes saying
help

no matter how hard we smile. Waiting
for the shutter's faint snip to release us,
I taste mothballs and juniper bushes,
I feel my body grow odd in its clothes,
I seem to hear somebody laughing at
me.

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Floor Furnace

We'd shiver and chatter in our sheets
until it stirred, an arthritic pet
haunting the dirt basement.

We'd listen for the snap, crackle, pop
of every antique joint, waking
as it talked itself awake,

then spring to the faint living room
when it finally began breathing
another day into being.

We'd loiter on the grave-sized grate
in the Motorola's silver glow,
saturated by radiance

so long our sleepy soles were scored
like waffles, my sister's gown
a tender flannel tent.

All summer long it would hibernate
under the crooked braided rug,
but at killing frost

we'd uncover the floor furnace again
and pray for a holiday snowfall
deep as that heat's rising.

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Reading in the Tulip Tree

Scaling my library of air,
through leaves idly riffled by wind
and scrutinized by the sun,
I'd climb till the tree's pliant crown
could bear no more, wedge
my crotch into some soft gray crook,
take a book from my teeth,
and read another afternoon away.

My mother, the nervous curator,
would chime from the screen
every quarter hour: "Honey? Honey?
Are you all right up there?"
The tree nodded yes, all its leaves
whispered yes, our old dog
asleep in my shadow flickering below
managed a friendly whimper,

but I closed my eyes to the words
and let the poplar sway me,
a minor character in Chapter 64
of some unfinishable novel
but, for a moment, the hazy focus
of all this buoyant light
from below and above and around me,
the sweet fire of tulip bloom.

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Stamp Album

The world lay filleted on its cover,
stamps flying like flags from the capitals.

I opened the album to Monaco,
laid a rich commemorative over its ghost.

The page seemed to quiver with color,
with the exotic mint perfume of the princess.

Not even machines would dare cancel
such exquisite taste, such high denomination.

*

The world seemed to come when ordered
to my imperial desk, itemized for mounting

in the museum I bent to every night,
lost in the crackle of glassine envelopes,

the perforation perfect as gear-teeth,
the mystery of those watermarks made visible

by the lamp as I hinged stamps, row after row—
those bright windows into distant lives.

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NANCY CARDOZO

The Middle Distance

Through far fields of our days and nights
wild creatures drew a silent wake,
hidden from view by the resilient grass,
a motion separating light from dark.

Once in the middle distance you and I
saw a hen pheasant lead her brood,
stippled like bark against the green, they moved
across our vision, faded into trees,
and left us staring mute, as if a look
could call them back—our eyes summoning wings
out of the leaves—
Swift visitors,
woodpecker, hermit thrush and flicker came,
but not the flashing gold or streak
of indigo we longed for.
Alone now,
I watch the field from where we used to stand,
waiting to tell you—Look, it's come at last—
and never hear the plummeting, the shriek
when the owl's bloodied mask tears out the heart.

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BARRY SPACKS

Gates

Blocking my path through broad, flat country,
no wall or fence to either side,
stands a rusting gate . . . still locked. Were the gateposts
sunk too deep for rooting out?

Another useless gate . . . I simply
walk around, the silly lock
a joke I slowly understand

who once would have prayed to the undeniable
fence or wall that somehow I'd find

its gate's exact key in my hand.

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RICHARD HORNBY

Minority Theatre

SOME OF THE BEST THEATRE IN NEW YORK is produced by minority groups. Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Jews, French, Italians, Irish, homosexuals, Orientals, find theatre the best medium for exploring their problems because, despite McLuhan and the mystique of electronic media, it is the most efficient way such groups have of communicating among themselves. Film and television are potentially much cheaper per audience member, but only when audiences are very large, because of the enormous capital investment required. The need for large audiences also means that film and television drama inevitably become homogenized; Hollywood executives have little interest in producing the work of minority writers or actors. ("The Cosby Show" is the exception that proves the rule; it does provide work for black actors, but has little to do with the realities of black life in America).

Theatre, however, requires only three boards and a passion, as Lope de Vega put it (though nowadays he'd have to throw in some lighting equipment as well). A stage play can be put together quickly and relatively cheaply; reaching audiences in the thousands rather than the millions, it can be frank, localized, and topical, or even parochial and jargonistic, if the performers and the audiences want it that way.

Charles Fuller's two new plays, *Sally* and *Prince*, produced in repertory by the Negro Ensemble Company under the joint title *We*, deal with black history, but are anything but parochial. Skillfully directed by Douglas Turner Ward on a small, bare, sloping stage (Lope de Vega would have been pleased), the two plays provide a panoramic view of the American Civil War and its aftermath from an African-American perspective. The large casts, the numerous, wide-ranging locales, and the episodic form of the works would seem to make them more suited to film than the stage, but theatre is a wonderfully flexible performance medium. With a bit of imagination and skill, it can suggest a vastness that film could only show literally, at considerably more expense.

Sally begins in South Carolina in the middle of the war. Its opening scene is an encounter between some black Union soldiers and a slave boy they stumble across. This is solidly based in history; there were indeed black troops in the Union army (Abraham Lincoln praised their bravery), and Fuller is imaginative enough to see the dramatic possibilities in such a confrontation, which must have happened frequently as the Northern armies advanced. The soldiers are tough,

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well trained, disciplined; their sergeant, Prince, is a thorough professional, completely at home in the army. His general, whose life Prince saved in battle, describes him as the best soldier in his command, black or white. The slaves, on the other hand, are naive and ignorant; there is a greater gulf between them and the black soldiers than between the soldiers and their white officers.

Though ignorant, the slaves are anything but stupid. Seeing the Northern army as their ticket to freedom, some, including the slave boy from the opening scene, join up; others become hangers-on, trading with the soldiers or, in the case of some of the former slave women, taking up with them. Sally, a young widow with a sixteen-year-old son, takes up with one of Prince's men, but becomes attracted to Prince himself. She yearns for some land, a man of her own, a secure family life. Prince, however, is a free-spirited fellow with no intention of settling down; he dreams of traveling west after the war, reaching the Pacific, seeing the world. Unlike Sally, whose black, and slave, heritage is inescapable, Prince seems part of the nineteenth-century American mainstream, with the same kind of ambitions and fantasies common to white men.

The central action of the play brings out the latent conflict between the white and black aspects of Prince's character. Congress decides to maintain the pay of black soldiers at three dollars a month less than that of whites. (This is again historically accurate.) The black soldiers go on strike. Their general, though sympathetic to their plight, sees this as a dangerous rebellion against his authority; forcing Prince to identify the ringleaders, he has them shot.

Several features emerge here that are common to both *Sally* and *Prince*, and to some of Fuller's other plays as well. Though some of his white characters are outright racists, most of the white authority figures are tolerant or even respectful of blacks; they typically do damage in spite of basically good intentions. Here, the General unwittingly imposes an agonizing moral dilemma on Prince, who must betray either his fellow black soldiers or the army system that he approves of and has flourished under. In Fuller's plays, the focus is on the injuries blacks do to blacks, which always result ultimately from the racist infrastructure in which they find themselves. It is the Aristotelian pattern of a tragic incident, performed at least partly in ignorance, "between those who are near and dear to one another."

In *Prince*, the title character has been transferred to guard duty at an army prison in Virginia. Guarding a Southern spy, who taunts him ruthlessly, he shoots the man dead. The scene shifts to a nearby farm, where ex-slaves are picking cotton for the North. There is also a fascinating black entrepreneur, a woman named Lu, who had been sold five times as a slave, and separated from her child. Now she has become a tough, yet generous, businesswoman, who makes a living selling sweetcakes and longs to own her own store. Again the plot turns on money; the fieldworkers' pay is long overdue. One of the

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blacks, Burner, complains that it is like slavery all over again. The well-intentioned, gentle, but benighted Northerner running the plantation sees this as a betrayal of the Union cause, and has him thrown in the prison. Not realizing that Prince is on the run, Lu insists that he free Burner, her lover. When Prince declares his intention to pursue his dream of heading west instead, Lu stabs him in a rage. The play is open-ended; Prince is apparently dead (Lu even shows his body to another character), but in the final scene he appears wounded but alive, on his way to the frontier. Fuller plans three more plays in the series, which will no doubt continue to deal with Prince's fortunes.

The outlines of both plays above are simplified; there are subplots, atmospheric scenes, and dozens of characters. Fuller is writing the kind of Brechtian "Epic" drama, with historical scope and episodic structure, that our white playwrights today shun, partly for financial reasons (only a subsidized American theatre company, like the Negro Ensemble, can afford to produce plays with such large casts), and partly from an obsession with individual psychology at the expense of historical or political perspective.

Fuller's sense of history is rather bookish and stilted, however, especially in contrast to August Wilson, who is not only our leading black playwright but probably the best American playwright writing today. Wilson has more feel for the atmosphere of an era, like the restless energy and feeling of uprootedness at the turn of the century in his *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, or the jazzy insouciance of the twenties in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. In *Sally* and *Prince*, however, the history is often merely unloaded, as if in an awkward lecture. When Fuller's soldiers discuss the Congressional debate about their pay, they sound like TV commentators, and when the Emancipation Proclamation is mentioned, we get it complete with date. Similarly, the dialogue at times sounds anachronistic, which it never does with Wilson; Fuller's characters here use jarring modern phrases like "Don't dicker around with me," "I don't give a damn," or "not too keen on." Such flaws weaken the dramatic thrust of the plays, though they certainly don't destroy it. Fuller has a firm awareness of the inherent moral dilemmas imposed on blacks by the Civil War, the way in which freedom involved terms and conditions that often forced them to deny themselves. He also, as usual, provides a vivid picture of army life—the boredom, the camaraderie, the gossip, the obsession with rank, and the sudden, almost unreal moments of violence. He is very good at depicting personal relationships too, especially friendship and marital love. Despite the historical setting, the ultimate subject of *Sally* and *Prince* is not history but ethics, but they are very good ethical plays indeed.

The acting of the members of the Negro Ensemble Company, one of the oldest theatre companies in New York, was of a consistently high standard. A number of performances were especially notable, including Ed Wheeler's plain, honest Burner and Hattie Winston's

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intense, commanding Lu. Samuel L. Jackson was tall, lean, strong, and, above all, soldierly as Prince, with particularly expressive eyes. I found Charles McClennahan's set to be too steeply raked to be always effective, though director Ward, as noted, used it well, aided by Arthur Reese's fine lighting, the principal design element for establishing the many locales. Judy Dearing's costumes, often appropriately ragged but always individualized, were equally beneficial.

The Puerto Rican Traveling Repertory performs in both English and Spanish, usually doing the same play in the two languages on different nights. Luis Rafael Sanchez's *Quintuplets*, which ran in late March and April, is the opposite of the Fuller plays, obscure, poetic, and certainly parochial, full of allusions to Puerto Rican culture and rambling, personal imagery that I am sure even a Puerto Rican audience would find heavy going. I saw the English-language version, which was difficult enough.

The play is a series of monologues at a supposed "Conference on Family Affairs" by six members of a troupe of entertainers, the Morrison Quintuplets and their father. The quints, all adults, and very Hispanic despite their English name, are an odd assortment: Daphne Morrison, a model, beauty contest finalist, actress, and dubber of Hollywood movies (she is the voice of Mighty Mouse in Spanish); Baby Morrison, a nervous young man who babbles on about his cat, which has the unlikely name of "Feisty Cock" (maybe it works in Spanish); Bianca Morrison, an equally nervous lesbian, dressed in white suit and turban like some 1920s poetess; Mandrake Morrison, an oily magician; Carlotta Morrison, a pregnant health fanatic; and the patriarchal El Gran Divo Papa Morrison, silver-haired and tuxedoed, who inhabits a wheelchair, as a result of an accident suffered in an obscure amorous adventure. On the initiative of Daphne, the monologues are all supposed to be improvisations, which turns them into erratic streams of consciousness that are sometimes interesting, sometimes funny (Carlotta's preparations for her imminent delivery, which involve her assigning precise duties to numerous members of the audience, are hilarious), and most of the time unbearably tedious.

The material does give us a strong sense of a family group, with all its neuroses and affections and hates; there are also unifying verbal motifs of the circus, animals, fairy tales, fire, and the devil that give the play a distinctive ambience. Nonetheless, I am impatient with any play that depends heavily (in this case, entirely) on monologues, which are lazy, undisciplined playwriting, and the "improvisation" premise here aggravates the problem. In a Pirandellian ending, the actor playing the father insists that "theatre is a daring tightrope act," but what is daring about plotless, free-associative monologues, which can go anywhere, and cannot possibly "fall"?

Sanchez is one of Puerto Rico's leading writers; although he has written nine plays, I suspect that fiction is his true métier. Certainly,

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Quintuplets would read better than it plays. In reading, there would be time to contemplate its images and figure out its complexities, and the lack of a plot would not necessarily be a weakness. But perhaps I am prejudiced by the forced, monotonous performances of Ivonne Coll and Roberto Medina, who played all six roles. Like Sanchez, they have excellent track records, but they needed to heed two pieces of advice from Stanislavski: First, the more tense a character you are playing, the more relaxed you have to be. Second, a sharply defined character must nonetheless be built up through variations and contrasts; an abrasive character needs gentle moments, a self-confident character needs moments of self-doubt, etc. Coll and Medina gave each of the six Morrisons vivid characteristics (aided by the excellent costumes designed by Laura Drawbaugh), but their vocal and gestural mannerisms became unbearably repetitive. It was funny the first time Coll, as the lesbian, knocked a cigarette out of her own mouth (the character is constantly rebuking herself, in this case to stop smoking), but when she repeated the action five more times during the course of the monologue, in exactly the same, obvious way, I nearly ran screaming from the theatre. Such repetition was typical of a general problem of heaviness and monotony, for which director Alba Oms probably deserves the majority of the blame. All and all, this was a disappointing production from a distinguished theatre company; I'll give them another try next season.

Meanwhile, back on Broadway, Richard Greenburg's *Eastern Standard* moved from the Manhattan Theatre Club to the John Golden Theatre late in December. This is yet another AIDS play, which is a sub-genre of the affliction plays that have been popular in America and, to a lesser extent, Britain for several decades. Brain tumor, blindness, deafness, aphasia, mental retardation, alcoholism, drug addiction, polio, war wounds, paraplegia, quadriplegia, mongoloidism, homosexuality (usually depicted as an affliction, which should draw more protest from gay liberation groups than it does), and the deformities of the Elephant Man are only some of the human misery to grace our stage. There are plenty of affliction plays in the classical repertory, of course, from Sophocles' *Philoctetes* to Ibsen's *Ghosts*, but while the illnesses or injuries in such plays from the past always have deeper resonances, as metaphors for the human condition, today's affliction plays typically avoid such implications, instead straining for cheap sympathy. What's wrong with sympathy for afflicted people, you might well ask? Nothing, of course—the world could use a lot more of it. But these plays evoke pity without terror. Most of the afflictions are ones that audience members are unlikely to get; the victims are depicted as odd, alien, sorry creatures rather than as protagonists. The plays evoke sympathy but not empathy, betraying a thinly disguised condescension: "There, thanks to the grace of God, I shall never go."

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Having got that off my chest, I must say that *Eastern Standard* is one of the better plays of the genre. The inherent sentimentality is fended off with some funny dialogue (my favorite *bon mot* of the season is when one of the characters summons a waitress in a Manhattan restaurant by calling "Oh, actress!") and clever plotting; the doomed gay couple are paralleled with a heterosexual pair whose foibles are amusing, and we are mercifully spared any *Camille*-like death scenes. In addition, the play was greatly enhanced by the superior acting of the Broadway cast, who could have read from the phone book and made it sound scintillating.

The story of the play concerns a conscientious young architect, Stephen Wheeler, and his girlfriend, Phoebe Kidde, whose brother Peter is a charming, atheletic-looking homosexual. Stephen's ex-roommate Drew Paley, also charming and extraordinarily witty (he has the "Oh, actress!" line), is strongly attracted to Peter. The first act has them all meeting in the restaurant, where they encounter, and assist, a bag woman who has been making a disturbance; in the second, a month later, they have all gone off to Stephen's summer-house on Long Island, accompanied by both the bag woman and, for some reason, the actress/waitress as well.

A series of scenes depict the characters' personal problems: Stephen hates his big architectural firm, which is committing "architectural warfare against Manhattan," building "ziggurats on Third Avenue." Phoebe, a Wall Street broker, is having trouble deciding between Stephen and her previous boyfriend Loomis, who is always trying to commit suicide. The bag woman, May Logan, and the actress, Ellen, are now both homeless. Drew has fallen in love with Peter, who obviously returns his affections yet remains aloof. Despite hints of illness, and information that Peter used to be notoriously promiscuous, the supposedly intelligent Drew doesn't catch on to what every member of the audience figured out back in the first act, that Peter has AIDS. Maybe love is blind.

By the end of the play, Stephen has quit his firm and become engaged to Phoebe; May has robbed them of their belongings and departed; Peter has finally let Drew in on the big non-secret, and the two agree to spend Peter's waning days in a romantic but Platonic relationship. The play has flirted with any number of serious subjects, including the sterility of modern architecture, the despair of the homeless, and AIDS itself, yet remains trivial. The love scenes are well done, and the dialogue, as noted, is often amusing, but none of the principal characters is touched very deeply by the issues in the play. Peter is a paragon of Boy Scout virtues (you'd think from these plays that no AIDS victim was ever mean or stupid), but his coyness about his illness, whose only real purpose in the play is to forestall the denouement, makes him seem shallow, as if raging against the dying of the light were just too much trouble. Having the bag lady rob the household is a deft satire of liberal sentimentality about the poor, but,

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significantly, the wealthy young characters just laugh the robbery off. These people have no money problems, no artistic problems (Stephen's concern about modern architecture is accompanied by no artistic drive or vision whatsoever), and no real love problems. The love relationships are romantic but tepid; Stephen and Phoebe will have a happy but dull marriage, while Drew will find somebody else soon after Peter dies. In other words, no one in the play ever changes, despite the serious issues hovering around, and no one is ever likely to.

Nevertheless, the cast certainly maintained my interest. Dylan Baker as Stephen managed to seem distracted but decent, a liberal out of his time; Patricia Clarkson looked like Nina Foche (do I betray my age?), and brought that same cool charm to Phoebe; Kevin Conroy was suitably handsome and dashing as Peter; Peter Frechette wins the Oscar Wilde Award for combining bitchy wittiness with goodheartedness (a combination found in Wilde himself, according to Ellmann's recent biography). Anne Meara was strong as the bag woman, but I was disappointed to see this fine actress playing this kind of role yet again; pretty soon we'll be hearing about an "Anne Meara type." In contrast to the acting, the settings by Philipp Jung, awkwardly adapted from the Manhattan Theatre Club production, were amateurish. The sky cyclorama looked wrinkled and tired; the masking was so perfunctory that the stage manager was visible in the wings from my sixth-row seat; the beach house, which Stephen is supposed proudly to have designed himself, was plain and drab. If that was Stephen's best, I'd suggest he go back to Third Avenue ziggurats.

The world is in a terrible state of chassis: I stopped in to see the heavy-handed Broadway production of *Born Yesterday*, starring Edward Asner (bad) and Madeline Kahn (not bad), to discover to my horror that the show was miked! The hollow, dead sound, which makes the actors seem frozen in amber, was apparent from the opening line. Electronic amplification has become standard in musicals (even including the wonderful Lincoln Center production of *Anything Goes*, which is still running), but this may be the first time it has happened for a play like *Born Yesterday*, an intimate little comedy from the 1940s. There were many problems with this production, but vocal power and diction were not among them; nor are the acoustics of the Forty-Sixth Street Theatre, built long before the electronic era, inadequate. I can only conclude that audiences, conditioned by television and stereo, have come to *expect* an artificial sound, the way some people prefer canned food to fresh. The next step, no doubt, will be to substitute a TV image for the live performers, so that audiences can pay forty dollars apiece to experience what they get in their living rooms for free.

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BERT CARDULLO

Boys' Life

THE BEST FILMS I KNOW ABOUT STREET CHILDREN are De Sica's *Shoeshine* (1946) and Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1951), the former set in postwar Rome, the latter in the slums of Mexico City—slums that are worse today than when Buñuel's camera uncovered them nearly forty years ago. When Hollywood tackles this subject, it produces a *Dead End* (1937): a film that wants to make a virtue of poverty (witness the popularity of the Dead End Kids) at the same time that it calls for the amelioration of the lot of New York's slum dwellers. The social problem meets the happy ending, and the result is unhappy contrivance. In *Shoeshine* and *Los Olvidados*, the social problem stands unadorned and the children unbuffered, and the result is tragedy. Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* is a worthy successor to these two works, not least because it points up, yet again, the difference between the documentary and fictional impulses on film.

Prior to *Salaam Bombay!*, this Harvard-educated woman made documentaries; that is, she *documented the reality* of social problems and the human misery caused by them. In her first fiction film, Nair continues to document a social problem—the poverty and exploitation of illiterate children abandoned to the streets by their overburdened families—but she does so through the story of the innocent, ten-year-old Krishna's initiation into a world of violence, thievery, and drugs. Unlike a documentary, Krishna's story is plotted, but the plotting doesn't exist for its own sake; rather, it serves to condense the randomness of his existence into a series of incidents that highlight his corruption by the evils of life on the streets. And this is Nair's object: to make Krishna's story stand out dramatically from (but not obliterate) the document of Bombay's thickness and squalor, its teeming, filthy streets and dingy, cramped interiors; to call attention to his most unsentimental of educations. Her ultimate goal, in this case, is the same as that of the documentarian—to improve the lives of the poor and especially of poor children—but her method is different. I bring all this up because commentators typically criticize social-problem films for their plotting, as if plotting itself (as opposed to contrivance) were an evil intrusion on truth instead of a device for revealing it. An unplotted documentary about street children wouldn't necessarily be "truer" than a fictional work on the same subject; it would just arrive at its truth by an alternate route, and, I might add, it would face as many perils along the way as its fictional counterpart.

One peril Nair and her co-scenarist, Sooni Taraporevala, avoided

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was making Krishna a bathetic character, a child so crushed by his experiences that watching his story becomes unbearable: his pain grows so great as to be alien, monstrous, and we must turn our faces from it. Krishna is resourceful, accepting, and patient, and like most of the people who surround him, he keeps his emotions contained—so much so that inner serenity seems to be his defining trait. Accordingly, Nair shoots *Salaam Bombay!* mainly in medium and long shot; she shuns the close-up because she wants our understanding more than our pity, and because she wants as much as possible to connect Krishna to the environment—the people and the city—that molds him even as he resists it. "Connect" is the operative word here, for Krishna is obviously not the only homeless child on the streets of Bombay, and just as obviously he and his cohorts grow up to become the pimps, prostitutes, thieves, and drug addicts who neglect, corrupt, and abuse children. This is his story and Nair wishes us to focus on it, but it is also through his sensitive eyes that she wants us to see the pain and horror in the lives of selected other slum dwellers—adults as well as children. Krishna gets the focus because in his innocence and compassion and, yes, his beauty, he has the most to lose, his waste is the most tragic. (In this he differs from the titular character of the Brazilian film *Pixote* [1981], a boy who begins in soullessness and whose story therefore degenerates into obscenity, sentimentality, and portentousness. *Pixote* was directed by Hector Babenco, that artificer who went on to give us the equally pat and empty *Kiss of the Spider Woman* [1986] and *Ironweed* [1988].)

Nobody calls Krishna by his given name; he's called *chaipu*, or delivery boy, since he works for a while as a tea runner to the local brothels. Throughout the film, at the same time as we are getting an intimate portrait of this ten-year-old, the oft-repeated *chaipu* serves to remind us of his anonymity and essential insignificance in the demimonde of Bombay. Krishna has come here from his home in Bangalore, which he left in order to avoid the wrath of an older brother to whom he owes five hundred rupees (so much for the family as haven in a heartless world). He is desperate to return to his mother, but he can't until he raises the money to pay his debt. Hence his appearance in the big city of Bombay after a stint with a traveling circus (which abandoned him); it is here that he hopes to earn enough money to pay back his brother and pay for his train ticket home. This is his goal all through the film—to reunite with his mother in Bangalore—and it is what lifts him above the other denizens of Bombay's underworld, what gives his life purpose. He works hard and saves his money from an assortment of jobs—tea runner, chicken-coop cleaner, chicken skinner, server at wedding banquets, and even thief. But simultaneously it is his kindness and compassion—traits surely learned at the knee of the mother he so reveres (his father has long been dead)—that lose him his jobs, his money, and finally his innocence and hope: this is his tragedy and what elevates his story

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above document, on the one hand, and pathos, on the other. Krishna is no mere victim of the streets, however worthy such a victim might be of our attention. He is a victim whose very goodness contributes to his victimization and whose undoing is thus all the more horrible. The very traits that make this boy stand out from his environment and could eventually release him from it, are the ones that conspire to sink him deeper into it. Such is the complexity of Mira Nair's rendering of the world.

Shortly after arriving in Bombay and taking the job as tea runner to the brothels (which are near the train station from which he so yearns to depart and behind which he sleeps with a gang of boys), Krishna becomes infatuated with a beautiful Nepalese girl who has been sold into prostitution by her parents (virgins fetch a high price on the Bombay flesh market—in this case, 10,000 rupees). Isolated from her family and by her language (she doesn't speak Hindi), and understandably reluctant to accept her fate, this girl is befriended by Krishna, who brings her free glasses of tea, sends her cookies, and plans to take her home with him to Bangalore. In return for this display of feeling, Krishna loses his delivery job (the best one he'll get) with the tea merchant—he, or rather his customers, the Nepalese among them, broke too many glasses, and his failed attempt to spirit her away from the brothel of her confinement ended in his being banned from selling tea there. On top of this, Krishna loses the girl's affections to Baba, the red-light district's chief pimp and drug dealer, who himself can do nothing to prevent her entrance into a life of prostitution, even though he wants to. And it is another girl, Baba and his prostitute-wife's neglected and nearly abused daughter, Manju, who, because of her attachment to the accommodating Krishna, gets them both arrested and placed in "chiller rooms," institutional children's homes that are more like prisons and little better than the streets. The eight-year-old Manju follows Krishna everywhere she can, even on the odd jobs he takes, and in the process she slows him down—slows him down, that is, in his race to keep out of sight of the police, who routinely pick up street children for straying outside the bounds of the ghetto, even when, as in Krishna's instance, they stray in search of work. The children need not have committed any crimes; their crime is their existence, as one boy's three-year sentence for urinating in public makes clear. Krishna remains incarcerated for only a short time before escaping over a barbed-wire barrier, but he is nevertheless shocked and brutalized by what he has experienced, from his fellow prisoners as well as from the guards. Also, he has yet to learn that he will never see Manju again; having been identified as the daughter of a drug dealer and a prostitute, she will be kept in an institution, apart from her parents, for the rest of her youth.

It is Krishna's relationship with Chillum more than any other person, however, that turns on him, robbing him of his chance to return home and contributing heavily to the film's catastrophe.

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Chillum is one of Baba's pushers and is himself an addict. He befriends Krishna because the latter is a soft touch who gives him money for drugs and helps—no, holds and hugs—him through bouts of withdrawal. But despite himself, Chillum grows fond of Krishna and, in one of several scenes in *Salaam Bombay!* whose joy seems fragilely to suspend itself above the meanness and misery of the street, he and the boy smoke hash, then talk, tease, tickle, laugh. Nair films this scene on the outskirts of the city in a long take (interrupted by a dissolve to indicate that the scene occurs over an even longer period of time): there are no cuts from man to boy and back, and during the dissolve the camera retreats from its medium shot of the two. The stillness of the shot, its length, its undivided, discrete space, its soft night light: all suggest that this is a privileged moment of respite and union for Chillum and Krishna—so much so that Nair pulls the camera back in order to include as much of their bodies as possible within the momentarily protected world of the frame. Ironically, it is during this scene that Krishna reveals to Chillum his plan to save the money necessary to repay his brother and go home to Bangalore. And it is Chillum who shows Krishna where he can hide his precious rupees upon their return to Bombay proper; who, after he is fired from his job as a pusher by Baba, in desperation steals Krishna's hidden savings in order to support his drug habit; and who dies of an overdose shortly thereafter. Krishna mourns him even as he mourns the loss of his money: the one is not more precious than the other, this child deprived of childhood still seems able to realize as he starts immediately back to work.

If Chillum at his best is the older brother that Krishna so urgently needs, then Baba's prostitute-wife at her best is his substitute mother: drying him off after a day of work in the rain, lending him small amounts of money, leading him and Manju in a liberating dance around her small apartment, earning his sympathy in her struggle for a better life. That struggle goes unsupported by Baba, whose concerns are sex and drugs rather than marriage and family, power and ownership instead of love and reciprocity. When he tries to prevent his wife from leaving him after the loss of their daughter to the state, and challenges her to strike back at him with the knife he offers (violence is the form of communication he knows best), it is Krishna who seizes the knife and stabs Baba to death. On one level, Krishna stabs Baba for his cruel desertion of Chillum, his feckless infatuation with the Nepalese prostitute-to-be, and his harsh treatment of his wife and daughter. On another level, Krishna stabs this man as if he were striking out against all that has oppressed him during his short life. In doing so, paradoxically, he reveals how thoroughly his environment has conspired to make him over in its own image: now he is a murderer. No longer can he imagine himself to be the peaceful, joyous Salaam, King of Bombay; no longer is he the Krishna of Hindu theology, the human incarnation of the second god of the Hindu

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trinity, Vishnu the Preserver. Krishna escapes to the street, where we leave him, ironically, in the midst of a religious festival. He and Baba's wife have lost each other in the jostling, surging crowd, and the camera tracks slowly in on him as he stares blankly off to the right, simultaneously crying and playing with a top. We have understood his dilemma, and now we may pity him and all like him in their agony and isolation. There is no final freeze frame for italics: the shot of Krishna continues unabated until the final fateful fade to black.

Unlike De Sica and Buñuel, Mira Nair had the advantage of color for her film. I say "advantage" because, although black and white can capture well the starkness and gloom of slum life, its blunt sameness all over the world, black and white obviously cannot capture the colors endemic to a particular slum, its own brand of variegated squalor. Bombay's dominant colors are tan and brown and sickly yellow (which seems to be the color of the air), and they pervade *Salaam Bombay!*, which was photographed by Sandi Sissil. When we get blues and greens, they tend to be pale and to recede in the frame; when we see red, as we do in the brothel scenes, for example, it is deep and dark where it is not cheap and garish. But color, no matter how tawny or pallid, tawdry or recessive, appears to open up the world, to unleash its multiplicity and infinite capacity in a way that black and white does not do. So the color filmmaker must be more careful than her black-and-white counterpart to make the *mise en scène* suggest the suffocating, closed-off quality of her characters' world. To this end, Nair fills her film with high-angle shots and bars that frame faces, be those bars on windows, cages, or fences. She's helped by her actors—non-professional children, all from the street, and professional adults—who suggest a containment that is as self-protective as it is self-effacing in this society where human life is so expendable. Shafiq Syed is Krishna, and he is affecting: soft, searching, simple, soulful. The professionals who surround him are all good, especially Raghubir Yadav, who plays Chillum. His is a sharply etched portrait, packed with gesture and nuance. He creates, he *acts*, and acts well. Shafiq Syed *is*, and need be nothing more. The social problem that his film embodies won't go away, alas, but neither will *Salaam Bombay!* It is here, it shall remain, and its triumph is to have created tragic beauty out of the suffering and chaos of street children's lives, and to have done so with their happy collaboration. They are thus ennobled, which is more than I can say for many who are far better off materially.

One of the arguments against tragedy is that it supports the status quo, supports the classical view of the world: i.e., in the instance of *Salaam Bombay!*, that the social problem of street children in underdeveloped countries can't be solved because it is a product of circumstances beyond our control, and that we must accordingly resign ourselves to this fact as we confer, through art, a measure of tragic dignity on the children, like Krishna, who suffer. Those who

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prefer the social documentary to the social-problem film endorse this argument against tragedy; those who are less doctrinaire recognize the validity of both forms and point to films like Bille August's *Pelle the Conqueror* as a kind of compromise between the two. This Danish work is an adaptation of the first volume of Martin Andersen Nexø's four-volume proletarian (and largely autobiographical) novel of the same name, which was published over the years 1906 to 1910.

Volume 1 is entitled "Boyhood," and it documents the vestiges of feudalism still to be found late in the nineteenth century ("Boyhood" begins on May 1, 1877, and ends on May 1st three or four years later) on the Danish island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea, where the nine-year-old Swedish boy Pelle Karlsson and his aging, widowed father, Lasse, have migrated in search of work and a better life. The Karlssons are hired to work for the Kongstrups of Stone Farm at extremely low wages and brutally long hours, and the film chronicles their (and others') exploitation by an agrarian system untouched by land reform, as well as Pelle's incipient moral and political awakening. "Boyhood" ends with his departure alone from Bornholm "to conquer the world"; Lasse stays behind, too old and too afraid to go out into the world again. Pelle begins, in Volume 2, as a shoemaker's apprentice in a small, provincial Danish town soon to be invaded by modern industrialism with its concomitant substitution of capitalism for the guild system. Volume 3 finds Pelle, at about age seventeen, in Copenhagen, Denmark's industrial capital, where the tenement in which he must live and the sweatshop in which he must work cause him to become a trade unionist and eventually a labor leader. By Volume 4, Pelle, now a socialist, is introducing the cooperative movement to Danish industry. So Pelle's development in these four volumes parallels the historic evolution of labor and he does become a sort of conqueror, unlike Krishna, who must give up the idea even of imagining that he is Salaam, the King of Bombay. Both Pelle and Krishna go on journeys in their respective films, but Pelle journeys out of the past—away from Sweden and then away from his father and Stone Farm—in order to create a new future, whereas Krishna journeys out of the past—away from his mother and Bangalore—only in order to be able to return to it, and finds himself instead trapped in an eternal, stinking present. The latter journey is dramatic, intensive, *contractive*, the former episodic, cumulative, *expansive*. There is hope for Pelle at the end of Bille August's film as there is not for Krishna at the end of *Salaam Bombay!*, and that is the measure of these films' separate truths if not of their separate nationalities and time periods.

Pelle's awakening is the result of what he witnesses and experiences on the large farm: the utter tyranny of the farm's foreman combined with the tyranny of work without end; his humiliating whipping by the young assistant foreman and his father's powerlessness to do anything about it; his and Lasse's living conditions in a small,

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fly-ridden room off to the side of the large barn that houses the cows (which they tend), in contrast with the Kongstrups' servant-attended life in their splendid manor house; the even more difficult life of his friend Rud, the bastard son of Master Kongstrup, who joins the circus rather than be starved and hated by his wild and bitter mother; the taunts and beatings from local boys because he is a Swedish "alien"; and, most important, his relationship with Erik, the one rebellious laborer at Stone Farm, who befriends Pelle and promises to take the boy with him to America. But Erik's rebelliousness is too blind and brazen and, before he can save enough money for the trip, he is accidentally reduced to imbecility in a fight with the foreman, against whom he had attempted to lead the farmworkers. Thereafter he obediently follows the foreman about, like a dog; and when he is not doing so, he stands pathetically near a window in the barn and steadily gazes out. His misguided, solitary revolt has resulted, not in his freedom from oppression, but in his domestication by it. Pelle has been watching the whole time and continues to watch in horror as, one day, the submissive Erik is led away from the farm by the foreman, presumably to be "destroyed" or simply abandoned. This incident is not in Nexø's novel; August (who wrote his own screenplay) invents it in order to make clearer Pelle's reasons for rejecting the position of assistant foreman offered to him by the Kongstrups (this offer is another invention of August's), and to suggest the different, reasoned and communal direction his revolt against economic exploitation will take after he leaves the farm. In other words, August invents here in order, paradoxically, to give "Boyhood" closure as well as open-endedness, to make this first volume stand on its own as well as point the way to the other three volumes. The young Pelle has learned from his experiences on the farm, unlike his father (Lasse urges him to become the very kind of assistant foreman who made Pelle's life miserable), and August crystallizes that learning in a way that Nexø does not. The latter's Pelle leaves Stone Farm because it gives him "no position and no prospects"; his awakening, his digestion of his agrarian experience, is entirely ahead of him.

Though (as is inevitable in any film made from a novel) August cuts certain things from the book, like the sentimental and palliative strand concerning the family of Kalle Karlsson, Lasse's brother on Bornholm, he keeps what's essential and sharpens it. In "Boyhood," Kalle's daughter Anna becomes pregnant by the owner's son on the farm where she works in the north, and she returns home to warm acceptance by her father, who will embrace her baby just as he embraced his wife's son by the lecherous Kongstrup years before. August takes Pelle's response to Anna's pregnancy ("Pelle knew quite well that what had happened to Anna was looked upon as a great disgrace, and could not understand how Uncle Kalle could seem so happy"), plus the boy's memory of an incident that had occurred outside the family two years before, and collapses them into a new

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version of her story. Anna now works on Stone Farm and is not a Karlsson; she falls in love with Nils, a local youth, much to the disapproval of his rich family, and when she gets pregnant (we discover her pregnancy precisely at the moment Pelle does) and secretly has Nils's baby, he drowns it. Anna goes to jail for the murder, Nils back to the bosom of his family. Ironically, he himself later drowns in the act of saving lives—those of several fishermen stranded off Bornholm's treacherous coast.

What incidents August retains from "Boyhood," he often improves. Two examples will suffice. When Lasse and Pelle disembark in Bornholm with other Swedes looking for work, they are met by Danish farm foremen seeking cheap labor. In the novel, after the last foreman has passed him up for younger, stronger men without children, Lasse leaves Pelle on the harbor square and goes to buy a bottle of brandy at a nearby tavern. When he returns, boisterous and wobbly from the few drinks already inside him, he and his son go to meet the foreman from Stone Farm, who has arrived late, and they get their job. In the film, Lasse also leaves Pelle on the harbor square, but he doesn't come out of the tavern until the foreman has found Pelle alone (where we've been watching him) and begun questioning him—all of this in long shot, at a slightly high angle. The changes August has made convey to us succinctly, visually, what Nexø must narrate "around" this scene: Lasse's weakness and ineffectuality, Pelle's vulnerability and isolation. The complement to this scene occurs at the end of "Boyhood," and here again August surpasses the original. In the book, Lasse and Pelle part just past the farm's outer buildings. The father stands looking after his son for a short time, then turns and goes back to his work; Pelle moves on through the land into "the great wide world," exuberantly singing a song of adventure. In the film, Lasse and Pelle say their farewells on a snowy field; the father remains in the middle of this bleak landscape, waving goodbye to his son; and Pelle struggles through the snow down to the sea, along whose narrow shore he begins his journey into the world, accompanied by a haunting piano melody. The camera holds on him, in long shot, as he walks away. August's ending is truer, warmer, to the experience Pelle has had and will have, and it underlines the difficulty and desolation of this separation for him from the father he has always loved but has now come to understand as well.

Max von Sydow is Lasse, and if viewers remember von Sydow from his films with Ingmar Bergman (e.g., *The Virgin Spring* [1960], *Winter Light* [1963], *Shame* [1968]) and Jan Troell (*The Emigrants* [1971], *The New Land* [1973]), that is because for these two directors he played complex characters in genuine works of art. For American directors, he has mostly been charged with the task of enlivening constructs—characters superficially drawn and superficially engaged: witness his role in Woody Allen's inane *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986). In *Pelle the Conqueror*, von Sydow returns to form, which for him has literal

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meaning: note how he makes his own gangling frame seem like that of the "bent little man" Nexø describes; watch him stoop, totter, shuffle, and squint his way inside this emotionally fragile figure who strains to be the sturdy foundation of his son's life. Pelle Karlsson is played by Pelle Hvenegaard, whose mother named him after the titular character of this Danish epic, and he is fine: extroverted yet reticent, proud yet fearful, sensitive yet sensible. Hvenegaard's wide eyes set the tone for his character and for the film: at once gentle and piercing. And this is exactly the quality that Jorgen Persson has got into his photographing of the seasons at Stone Farm. He doesn't gild the Scandinavian summer, as he did in *Elvira Madigan* (1967); he captures, he serves, its essence, its breezy lushness. He doesn't make finely observed etchings of cheery winter life; he creates pictures in which the fog and snow and ice surround the huddled human figure with their grays and glistening whites. Persson may have been helped in his work by Bille August, who began his career as a cinematographer.

I don't know any of August's previous films (e.g., *In My Life* [1978], *Twist and Shout* [1984]), but I do know that in *Pelle the Conqueror* he has made a movie of lasting quality, of closed and then ever more open space, of so much work that play seems like exquisite luxury, of peasants' subjugated lives and one boy's mastery of his own. August is said to have two other films in the early stages of preparation; I wait impatiently even as I thrive on *Pelle*'s riches.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

ONE EFFECT OF AMERICA'S CHANGING PLACE in the post-postwar world has gone unnoticed by our busy and feverish cultural pundits: the decline of a New York appearance as an indispensable ingredient in classical music careers of international aspiration. New York was once as closely linked to a successful launch and subsequent trajectory as the booster rockets are to the space shuttle's flight. For a singer, a conductor, an instrumentalist, a chamber ensemble or even an orchestra hoping to secure world acclaim, liftoff was well nigh impossible if their Carnegie Hall or Metropolitan Opera or Avery Fisher or Town Hall dates were flameouts.

Today, the European countries have regained both cultural confidence and economic parity, and singers and conductors make important careers with only rare appearances on this side of the Atlantic. A Tokyo stop is obligatory for an orchestra on tour, but New York might be traded off for Sydney or even Moscow. Yet the mystique of a New York success does survive for the international pianist. Few if any get started without a Carnegie or Avery Fisher date early in their careers, and they are obliged to revisit regularly.

The season just past was no exception. Pianists flocked to New York, young and old, obscure and revered, from debutants barely out of the conservatory to such transcendent veterans as Mieczyslaw Horzowski, still garnering laurels at age 96. The choice of the six I heard was dictated largely by accidents of timing and personal circumstance, rather than by plan or artistic preference. All of them—Ivo Pogorelich, Vladimir Feltsman, Alfred Brendel, Eugene Istomin, Radu Lupu and Maurizio Pollini—have considerable international reputations already; only one, Istomin, is American, and his parents were Russian.

But if chance limited my perspective in a way I would not have chosen deliberately, it did at least make direct comparisons among the six equitable. A further consequence of their stature was that four of them were heard in Carnegie Hall, a fifth in Avery Fisher and the last in Alice Tully. So here too the ground for comparison was roughly level.

I cannot say that hearing the six in the space of two months or so produced any overriding insights into the state of the keyboard or the piano recital in our time. Critics of the piano for the past two or three decades have frequently complained about a stifling uniformity of approach to the classics of the literature. Certainly none of our

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postwar artists display the interpretive latitude that was common in the days of Rachmaninoff, Paderewski and Hoffmann. But what sounded to those critics like individuality and expressive utterance sounds to me and many others of my generation like self-indulgence, the willful sacrifice of musical values to personal aggrandizement.

By the same token, though it could be argued that all the pianists I heard were similar in their approach to the music they played, that similarity betokened an intention to find the unifying musical and rhetorical sense of the score at hand, and as such will spur no objection from me. And in spite of that the results showed sufficient and enlivening variety. Two of these pianists, Pogorelich and Pollini, played the Liszt Sonata in B minor, and the performances, though neither stretched musical logic, were strikingly different. Such differences suggested that these artists can be distinguished from one another by the still useful labels Apollonian and Dionysian. Pollini, Brendel and Istomin seem decidely Apollonian, Pogorelich seems clearly Dionysian, and Feltsman and Lupu fall somewhere in between, holding both tendencies in a mostly persuasive equilibrium. One thing binds the six together (or at least five of them, the exception to be noted below): a secure and formidable technique. Only very rarely did the listener suspect that some apparently freely chosen option was dictated by what fingers could do rather than what the mind intended.

The role of technique, particularly that of a solo instrumentalist, is frequently misunderstood. Musically unsophisticated concertgoers equate technical mastery with musical sovereignty—a phenomenon well known and often deplored. But musical sophisticates make a corresponding and less obvious mistake when they dismiss technical facility as somehow secondary to interpretive "depth." In truth, technique is the sine qua non, without which interpretive gifts are next to meaningless. What some listeners hear as interpretation may be, as I suggest above, simply the effect of technical weaknesses. Technical skill must precede and anchor interpretation. Unquestionably, when high technical accomplishment serves a mediocre musical mind, as in the case of Vladimir Horowitz, the results merit skepticism. But when the opposite is true—as, say, in the late recordings of Artur Schnabel, which are held in high esteem by musical sophisticates—when, that is, the technical facility cannot meet the demands of a first-class musical mind, we should be equally ready and able to find the results wanting.

The first of these pianists I heard was Ivo Pogorelich, the youthful Yugoslav who, like many others before him, sprang into international prominence by gaining the finals of the Warsaw Chopin Competition. Since that time (1980) he has appeared with many of the world's major orchestras and in most of the large Western cities as a recitalist, and has gained a reputation for excess and flamboyance both at the piano and away from it. His Carnegie Hall recital early this year did

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not bear out the extremes of that reputation. His stage demeanor and dress were conventional, and his program—two Brahms Rhapsodies, Op. 79, the Liszt Sonata and the 24 Chopin Preludes, Op. 28—was almost safe. His playing was secure, satisfying and only occasionally eccentric. The second of the Brahms pieces was taken at a slow tempo that subverted the pianist's attempt to sustain its musical argument, and, in one or two instances in the Chopin set, a perverse tempo choice skirted musical disaster. But often among the latter the digital dexterity, strengthened by a true *dolce* touch, bore exquisite fruit. Pogorelich's left-hand work was fleet and distinguished, and his pedalling unobtrusive and solid. The Liszt Sonata was the least satisfactory achievement of the evening. Its problems in performance are legion, but perhaps chief among them is finding ways to characterize its oddly assorted thematic material without rendering the piece impossibly episodic. Pogorelich's attempt was hobbled by flawed dynamic control, something that afflicted the rest of his playing as well. He tended to arrive soon at a *forte* or *fortissimo* and to have nowhere to go when musical flow required an increase in volume. Pogorelich delineated the imitative spans clearly, and set out many of the thematic transformations powerfully, but overall there was little feeling of cumulative growth and cohesion.

Vladimir Feltsman, by contrast, is a master of modulated volume at the piano, and much more as well. In his Avery Fisher Hall recital the exiled Russian pianist offered two Beethoven sonatas, the F minor, Op. 2, No. 1, and the final work of the canon, the C minor, Op. 111, and he closed with Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In the early Beethoven work (1796) he played for the most part in the currently acceptable manner for music of this period—music, that is, for the less dynamically robust keyboard instruments that preceded the "pianoforte." His touch was light and often slightly *détaché*, and he was sparing in his use of *rubatos*, *tenutos* and dynamic contrasts to point and emphasize—except in the slow movement, where a greater variety of touch and inflection yielded dividends. The C minor sonata is "late Beethoven," and that means that it has a special niche in the consciousness of musical true believers. Whether this work would inspire such awe if it bore the signature of, say, Franz Liszt is a question that cannot be answered, but one that occurs to me on every occasion I hear it. Feltsman made the best case for it that I can recall: The structures of the *Maestoso-Allegro* and the *Arietta con variazione* emerged clearly, never blunted by careless phrasing or smudged by excessive pedal. The concluding *Adagio* section built steadily, and the *cantabile* was sustained about as well as it can be over its long span. Feltsman's dynamic magic was evident here: Just as you thought he had reached his maximum, he revealed—or was able to create the illusion—that he had held something in reserve.

This gift served him beautifully too in the Mussorgsky *Pictures*. It is a surefire piece if there ever was one, and yet Feltsman brought to it

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a rare quality: a natural flow and absence of strain, a spontaneous ease no matter what the inflections of time or dynamics he employed. My lone small cavil is that he did not impart much feeling of mystery to the "Catacombs" sequence. In "The Great Gate at Kiev," so difficult to render as a satisfying climax and conclusion, his ability to pull (or seem to pull) ever greater volumes of sound out of the hat, coupled with his other strengths, made for a rousing end to the afternoon.

The Carnegie Hall program for Alfred Brendel's recital bore the rubric "Themes and Variations." The chosen examples of this form were by Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt and Brahms, and yet, despite the differences of attack and dynamics employed by the Austrian pianist, a single impression emerged from all of them: a certain abstemiousness, almost fastidiousness. I was often more aware of what the pianist forbore to do than of what he was doing. Technically, Brendel is certainly in a class with Pogorelich, Feltsman and the others. In Mozart's Variations on a Minuet by Duport, K. 573, he played in the manner that Feltsman used in the early Beethoven sonata, and it was easy to admire the purity of the scales and passagework and the careful rounding of phrase-endings. The Brahms Theme and Variations arranged from the *Andante* of the String Sextet, Op. 16, were less effective: Some of the figuration was strenuous and tedious, and much of the piece's rhetoric fell flat—perhaps as much Brahms's fault as Brendel's. Things were better in the evening's second half. Liszt's Variations on Bach's "*Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*" (Cantata No. 12) makes rather unconvincing use of chromaticism, particularly as it is all capped by the square harmonies of the chorale "*Was Gott tut ist wohlgetan.*" But its passacaglia form holds it together, and it can have considerable impact. In his best performance of the evening, Brendel employed *ritards* and *accelerandos* to make the terse and dense rhetoric mount to its rather slack conclusion. Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, Op. 120, were not quite so successful. In his fascinating essay in the program booklet, Brendel cited humor as the guiding spirit of the bulk of these variations. But I for one had a hard time hearing it in his fluent but lightly inflected and sometimes underarticulated playing. Too many of the thirty-three variations began at the same dynamic level as the one previous, and ended there too. Though occasional delicacy and playfulness came across, too much seemed relentless and unyielding.

A similar tendency to vitiate momentum with a sameness of dynamics, added to a paucity of telling inflection and a habit of repeating identical figures without subtle alteration, characterized Eugene Istomin's Carnegie Hall appearance. He began with Mozart's Fantasia in D minor, K. 397, and continued with the same composer's Sonata in G major, K. 283, and Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata, Op. 53. Phrases were well sculpted and passagework was accomplished. Yet Istomin seemed less than wholly involved with either Mozart's gentle rhetoric or Beethoven's theatricality. The opening movement

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of the Mozart sonata gave the impression of moving too fast for full articulation—probably the result of a technique not fully up to what the pianist tried to demand of it. Precipitate attacks cut into the repose of rests, and there was little dynamic variation. In these works, in spite of much that was beautiful and just, the listener was too often reminded of a player piano. After intermission Istomin played three Preludes from Debussy's Book I and two Chopin pieces, the Impromptu in F-sharp minor, Op. 36, and the Scherzo No. 1 in B minor, Op. 20. The pianist pedalled the Debussy in much the same way as the Mozart and Beethoven, and so sacrificed some of the music's evocative nuance. It was perhaps another manifestation of Istomin's want of technical command that the connecting material in the Impromptu was unclear and clumsy, and the great Scherzo, though executed well, was oddly perfunctory, as if the pianist were embarrassed by the sweep of its utterance.

Perfunctory was an adjective that also occurred to the listener during Radu Lupu's Tully Hall recital. But on this occasion it seemed a function of a natural and effortless address to the keyboard. The Romanian pianist sat in a chair before his Steinway, leaning against its back, and imparted spontaneity to all that he did. Bach's Partita No. 1 was captivating in its easeful flow; it was sufficiently inflected to spring to life, but there was little sense of pressing forward. Mozart's Sonata in F major, K. 533/494, was a similar case: The approach was relaxed and flowing, almost *détaché* in touch, with modest pedalling. One New York critic theorized that Lupu's design was to suggest the pre-pianoforte keyboard, just as I guessed Feltsman's was in his early Beethoven sonata. But Lupu's practice of slighting downbeats in the steady digital flow too often left harmonic structure unclear, and the absence of tension sapped the drama from the beautiful *Andante*. After intermission, with the Sonata in B-flat, D. 960, of Schubert, Lupu came into his own. He is one of the great Schubert stylists of our day, and this performance, masterfully controlled, full of delicate *rubato* and *Luftpausen*, the piano sound rich and firm from top to bottom, was ample demonstration of his stature.

For this grateful listener the most fascinating and the most enigmatic of these artists was the Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini. In technical mastery of the keyboard he is unquestionably the equal of anyone I heard this season and probably of any pianist currently before us. His deployment of the arsenal of colors, dynamics and agogics—the inflection of line by variations in duration, such as the *rubatos* and *ritards* I have referred to—is supreme, and no one else I know of demonstrates such authority in a wide range of styles, from Schubert and Chopin to Schoenberg and later twentieth-century composers. Yet he cannot shake a reputation for being a mere manipulator. The piano buff who sat next to me on one of the two evenings I heard Pollini in Carnegie Hall, though he was mesmerized

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like the rest of the audience, called the artist "a hard-boiled son of a bitch."

It is true that Pollini never creates the impression of being a natural, like Feltsman and Lupu. It is no accident that, whereas Lupu leans back in a chair, Pollini sits tense on the forward edge of the piano bench. That attitude sounds in his playing. And what playing! The Schubert Sonata-Fantasia in G major, D. 894, displayed a broader range of capacities than I can recall hearing in such a work. Among them were a warm and mellow sound, with a solid but well-defined bass and a full but not clangy high register, drawn from a Hamburg Steinway the pianist brought in for the occasion. He proved he could produce a true *dolce* tone when it was called for, and his structural finesse was as usual matchless, combining shapely treatment of phrases with dynamic contrast and a feeling of forward motion. And yet occasionally the sophistication verged on the mannered: The final phrases of the sonata, for example, had an artificial ring. The second half of the program contained three negligible Liszt pieces along with the Sonata in B minor (this was Liszt's season in New York recital halls). Pollini did not find the tone-painting resources to rescue the miniatures from banality. But the sonata was totally persuasive, marrying precise calculation of the weight and intensity needed for each thematic statement to the rhythmic tension and dynamic control needed to drive the music's progress toward a satisfying conclusion.

Pollini beggars the poor critic's vocabulary, which is barely adequate to the task of describing the most mundane of musical matters. In searching for an adjective to describe his playing in a general way, I can do no better than "patrician." It is a condition that encompasses the elevated grandeur of the Chopin Scherzo in B-flat minor, Op. 31, that he offered as an encore—an encore!—after his first concert. But the condition founders on the comfortable bourgeois affections that run through the Brahms Four Piano Pieces, Op. 119, that opened his second recital. Here he sounded ill at ease, unable to clarify the thematic threads implicit in the heavy chordal textures. That program continued with a remarkable performance of Schoenberg's Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11. The pianist rendered these memorably, with a deep-seated strength and caressing tone that forged the link with Brahms that their composer often remarked upon. (Carnegie's unsigned program notes were shockingly uninformed on Schoenberg's career and the character of these pieces.) He followed with two complex Piano Pieces by Karlheinz Stockhausen, works that provide the executant with options for their performance. These required the utmost concentration from both performer and audience, and when some in the latter audibly demonstrated their reluctance to give it, the pianist's own was momentarily shattered by astonishment.

Pollini's final undertaking was Beethoven's Sonata No. 29 in B-flat major, Op. 106, known as the "*Hammerklavier*" because it was written

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in part to show off the capabilities of the pianoforte (the German and the Italian words are equivalents). The pianist's authority in this work is as well known as its gargantuan difficulties are notorious. But here, surprisingly, Pollini's technique faltered. The massive chordal passages of the opening movement were slightly blurred, and portions of the succeeding Scherzo stumbled along, rather than flying with this pianist's accustomed aplomb. The *Adagio sostenuto*, perhaps reflecting his discomfiture, never developed much momentum, and ended up sounding mechanical. But he redeemed the performance and his reputation for *sang-froid* with a stupendous and convincing statement of the closing three-voice fugue, almost impossible in its demands on the executant.

It seems a certainty that future seasons will yield a similar richness of piano talent. I will seek out Pollini on every occasion I can, and Feltsman and Lupu as well, and will follow Pogorelich's career with fascination. And not the least of anticipated pleasures is sifting the abundance of opportunities every New York winter supplies to discover an incipient Pollini or Feltsman or Lupu.

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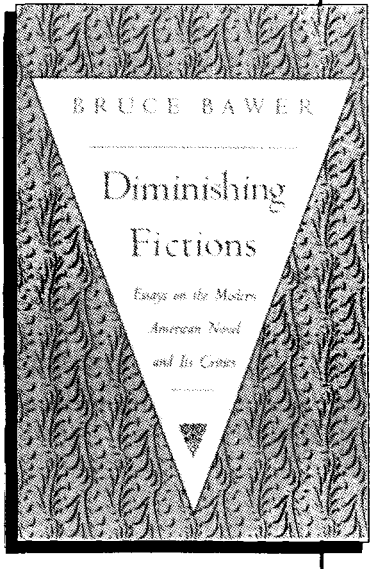

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SONYA RUDIKOFF

How They Thought about Sexuality in Late Antiquity

THE INTEREST OF A "COMMON READER" IN SEXUAL RENUNCIATION must necessarily be limited, at least as Early Christianity conceived of sexual renunciation. That common reader in whose opinions Dr. Johnson rejoiced to concur, and for whom Virginia Woolf collected her essays, is perceptive and intelligent, alert, educated, and informed, but moved more by a personal desire for useful knowledge than by a professional concern for specialized contributions to carefully demarcated fields of expertise. Urgent contemporary concerns may actually provoke the most prominent interest in the subject of this remarkable book:[1] "the body" and "society" are continuing preoccupations, perhaps never more so than at the present time, when old assumptions about these matters have long been abandoned and the suggested replacements are not yet altogether satisfactory. In the two centuries since Dr. Johnson referred to the "common reader," and even in the sixty-odd years since Virginia Woolf was inspired by the term, fewer and fewer of such readers can be said to be Christians (or to adhere to any systematic faith at all); the entire subject of sexuality is now no longer restricted to the domain of theological pronouncement or moral prescription, but has become a subject of history, of psychology, of sociology. Contemporary sexual practices have become more dependent on individual preference, decision, or belief than, as in the past, on the authority of religious ideals enunciated by those empowered to enforce the civic or divine will in an atmosphere of universal deference. Professor Brown addresses the subject as a historian well-known for his command of the world of late antiquity; his biography of Saint Augustine is widely acclaimed, his studies in religion and society of the period, and in its cults and saints, have made his reputation as a historian, and other historians with comparable expertise will review and discuss his scholarship. The "common reader," however, may have neither the required experience with ancient texts, nor the professional commitment to the specific outlines of the subject that absorbs scholars of religious history and antiquity, although Professor Brown's skill, his range, and his bibliography must surely command respect, and his engaging and spirited prose will

[1] THE BODY AND SOCIETY: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity, by *Peter Brown*. Columbia University Press. $45.00.

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surely captivate even the reader not drawn to religious or theological history.

A "common reader" may not regularly consult Origen or Clement of Alexandria when contemplating questions of human sexuality. Saint Augustine is naturally more familiar to the educated reader, having found a central place more than fifty years ago in the humanities curricula of American colleges and universities, but even the brilliant and powerful mind of the Bishop of Hippo has a limited authority for our contemporaries, and is not for every day. In recent years, the Gnostics have exerted charm and, with the Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls, make a fascinating and mysterious chapter in religious history which can be approached by readers other than the devout. What of Tertullian, Ambrose, Jerome, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Eusebius, Porphyry, the Encratites, the Marcionites, the Messalians, the Pelagians, all the worthy and accomplished writers, the devoted believers, the energetic and unflagging advocates and adherents committed to a "new creation" and intensely possessed of the Spirit? These figures of late antiquity have not vanished altogether into the mists of the centuries separating them from us. They cross modern intellectual paths, certainly, but serious questions arise about what they say to us. Sexuality is always of deep and pressing interest; but there would be enormous difficulty in making the connections between sexual renunciation as a religious practice linked to a whole history of theology and theory, and the kind of contemporary sexual renunciation which is often recommended for the amelioration of current sexual problems, say, for the affliction of AIDS. Impassioned dialogues of third and fourth century celibate priests on sexual purity in the desert, or arguments for perpetual virginity, cannot be translated smoothly into the discourse about our own personal situations fifteen or more centuries later, and in circumstances so changed that the ideas themselves may be entirely unavailable. In a world of MTV and rock videos, cable TV and blue movies, of condoms in vending machines, single mothers, homosexual marriages, and a 50% divorce rate, the ideas about sexuality circulating in our ordinary life have gone far beyond the dicta of the Desert Fathers, and are not even addressed by them.

But such direct intellectual transfers are hardly the point of books like Professor Brown's, and "common readers" surely know this. Another effort is required, because, as the author notes, these people of late antiquity are unmistakably different, removed, closed to us. Their ideas, their feelings, their arguments and problems do not spread out before us like an open landscape. There is a somber and even pessimistic cast shadowing this effort to explore the thought of Early Christianity on sexuality three or four centuries before the theologians of the Middle Ages codified Christian doctrine. So much history has happened, so many earnest and committed thinkers have produced so much complicated argument over so many centuries that

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the contemplation of it can be daunting to anyone in the Church, or outside it. For those not professionally involved in the intricacies of doctrine, the progress of thought from Saint Paul to Saint Augustine, in its intricate steps and momentous stages, may not be altogether clear. The history of the assumption of magisterial authority on behalf of certain Christian doctrines may not have been destined to reveal itself precisely as it has done. Certainly, other outcomes are conceivable, and the richness of the historical tradition may glow as much from the ideas that were *not* universally adopted as from those that did gain widespread adherence throughout the Mediterranean regions in the second and third centuries. Those early Christians did not all think alike; the arguments which triumphed may not have produced the "new creation" that Christ and Saint Paul had in mind. In any case, the arguments entered into through those crucial centuries before their medieval institutionalization should help the common reader to avoid simple assertions collapsing the thought of Saint Paul and Saint Augustine on sexuality into a single set of beliefs. This is where Professor Brown's mastery of his complicated thesis, and his evident and supple command of his material, can be seen at their most dazzling, as he traces the intellectual developments that occurred between those two critical figures.

It is a difficult history to follow, and the actual world of late antiquity must be kept in mind. Saint Paul did not himself know Jesus but was converted by the spirit of the crucified Christ. Not surprisingly, then, his great missionary effort to the scattered communities he visited and exhorted would be to emphasize the spirit and to mark it off from the flesh; his evangelism would make the "new creation" open to all who could receive the Spirit, pagans or Jews. From the revolutionary disruption in which Paul preached, to the more continuous and established life of Christian households throughout the Mediterranean regions, those new beliefs about a crucified and resurrected Jesus were gradually transformed. His imminent return to earth did not occur; instead, a continuing discourse about the implications of the Christian message solidified the developing doctrine. This was what happened in those four or five centuries that preceded the Middle Ages, and this complex development is Professor Brown's subject—not the explication of the doctrine or the defense of it, but a history of its successive transformations.

From Paul to Anthony, the ensuing three hundred years saw ideas about sexuality changing: ideas of continence and celibacy which might have been peripheral to the "new creation" became central, against a background of Roman assumptions about the city and the social uses of sexuality. Ideas of body and mind, body and soul, flesh and spirit, already well developed from classical philosophy and pagan cults, offered alternative modes of thought as new generations of those filled with the Spirit struggled with the implications of their belief. The wave of asceticism generally, and the passion for sexual

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renunciation in particular, occurred in a world where the average life expectancy was less than twenty-five years, where barely 4 out of 100 people lived beyond the age of fifty. Death cast its heavy shadow, and sexuality had been enlisted to serve the requirements of the generations. How did the God of the Spirit dissipate this bondage to the Creator-God? It is not hard to see how the idea of sexual renunciation came to seem liberating, and how a new dedication to the Spirit that had conquered death could summon the energies not only of religious leaders but of entire communities. Sexual renunciation could become, as Professor Brown observes, a *carrière ouverte aux talents. Chastity* in itself would represent the "new creation" until Christ returned, by abruptly halting the unending unbroken flow of human sexuality, which symbolized the creatureliness of humankind. In this renunciation a lost human freedom would be regained.

Prophets, virgins dedicated in perpetuity, holy wanderers, Desert Fathers, holy wise women, the martyrs, Saint Thecla, Saint Perpetua, and the rest, all came out of this simmering of ideas that followed the preaching of Saint Paul about the crucified Christ. Their examples and their acts contributed varying responses to the urgent problems of the new believers: questions of prophecy and continence, virginity and martyrdom, the relation of sexual difference to the resurrection of the flesh, the question of immutable human nature and how it would be transfigured in eternity. Professor Brown skillfully offers the theses and antitheses which developed in gradual intellectual and theological discourse, showing how whole regions of the world of late antiquity would be swept by repeated inspirations of new thought and new argument. His meaningful insight brings to mind the successive waves of religious revival in nineteenth-century America, when so many of our own people were repeatedly swept into passionate new belief, so often, in western New York, for example, that the entire area was known as the "Burned-Over District." That this intellectual history was not a smooth sweet discourse but a rather violent disruptive polemical progress is an important part of Professor Brown's retracing of critical stages in the development of Christian thought on sexuality.

It was a confused and confusing time: the ideas of virginity, of Christ's embrace, the discipline of the senses, the idea of the church as a body, were debated. Radical Christians, vegetarians and other ascetics, Manichaean missionaries competed for the allegiance of the new believers and their theorists. Entire villages, whole districts of Syria or the Holy Land or the Anatolian plains or other regions, would be captivated by idiosyncratic interpretations of the ideas circulating in Antioch or Rome, Smyrna, Carthage, or Caesarea. Primitive communications and great distances insured that these ideas and their implied practices were pursued for long periods in isolation. As Professor Brown notes, "Variants of Christianity that now lie so neatly, side by side, in books on the shelves of a modern library, were

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often unknown to each other at the time." Was there in that late Roman society a sudden surge of births or an improvement in the conditions of survival? An unexpected new prominence of certain age cohorts that transformed the look of the world for those growing up in it? Were there unanticipated pressures on the available resources, or an absence of the appropriate technology for making use of them? What might have turned the privileged young people of that world against the prudent and devoted maintenance of social continuity and, instead, intoxicated them with another direction of their energies, the *idea* of sexual renunciation?

In Egypt, there were colonies of monks and nuns all up and down the Nile, and the new society of the desert at the edge of the settled land became a symbol of still another effort of renunciation, the geographical disengagement from the world creating a new image of the Christian task, developing notions of a spiritual "counter-world" which would find its place in the increasingly complex repertoire of evangelistic ideas. Monastic preoccupations threw a new light on other aspects of the life of the flesh, the associated vices of greed, avarice, gluttony, and the problem of the pure heart and the divided heart. Food and hunger, famine and sufficiency, emerged as another powerful focus of the body's dynamic life and the soul's struggle. The representative texts of the fourth and fifth centuries also demonstrate the enduring power of what Professor Brown calls "the extensive rubbish heap of Near Eastern misogyny," which becomes more prominent from the point of view of monastic life in the desert, and which was deliberately used in the argument to define the role of the ascetics in late Roman society. Sexual danger and sexual purity were seen not from the standpoint of the ancient city and the pious household, but now in a different way.

As for the women of the period, who were thought to represent in their immutable nature the same threat to monastic life as the settled land represented for the life of the desert, the women too were caught up in asceticism and renunciation, especially the holy women of fourth-century Cappadocia. Women with ascetic vocations became an integral and critical part of Early Christian movements, and, in fact, were so prominent in the fourth-century Christian landscape that theorists used the example of women's virginity to provide the foundation of advanced thought on the nature of the Spirit. Throughout the Mediterranean region, martyrs like Saint Thecla, and saintly holy women like Melania came to stand for all that was most holy and would themselves represent the untouched desert. Their virginity or continence, their consecration, their loyalty, and their embodiment of the sacralized life of the Spirit, could represent possibilities within asceticism that provoked awe in the male clergy. They established shrines and convents, they brought their wealth as well as their energies, they patronized clerical intellectuals and were widely known for their piety and their spiritual example. At the same

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time, ruminative bishops were disturbed by the threat of radical asceticism directed against the continuance of pious Christian households and a settled Christian life. So they resorted to the available misogyny to reinforce the sense of sexual danger. The slow development of the meaning of the Virgin Birth and the cult of Mary are interestingly shown by Professor Brown against this background, together with ideas of grace, creativity, and spiritual boundaries, which became critical toward the end of the period. The different roles of clergy and laity came to be defined more sharply as the nature of virginity was explored by fifth-century thinkers. Similarly, the immutable nature of sexual difference came to be thought of in terms of the new interest in boundaries and the perpetual closed remoteness of consecrated virgins. It is only after all these intellectual strands have been identified and disentangled from the extremely complicated discourse of the Early Church that Professor Brown comes to Saint Augustine and his sharpened and newly focused comprehension of sexuality, sexual shame, and the profound discordances of the human will.

This body, this sexuality, was not so much the body experienced or enjoyed as it was the body feared—by Basil, Gregory, Ambrose and even Augustine, one of the few theologians who had known sexual pleasure. It was the body of torture and temptation, of heartburn, stomach cramps, or diarrhea experienced by the monks fasting in the desert; the body of the divided heart experienced in close monastic communities. It was not the ordinary body of daily life, in a time of primitive sanitary facilities, unpaved roads, unsanitary food and utensils, uncertain water supply, and an abundance of infections and diseases. Nor was it the body that gets tired or that becomes ill, hardly even the body that ages. Rather, it is a very young virginal body full of the future, or the ideal young man's or young woman's body full of sexual desire, or the aged, fragile, dematerialized body of sages or hermits, and all as seen by theological writers engaged in a world-renouncing discourse. It is in fact the *idea* of the body, and of sexuality which suffuses the representative texts.

Perhaps most significant of all, it is the idea of a body experienced by men, and the idea of girls' and womens' bodies as contemplated by male authors. No women's voices speak here, no women's experiences are recorded. Even the heroic and transfigured lives of Saint Thecla, of the two Melanias, both revered, of Paula, and of other saintly women of late Roman society are all recounted by men, either in legend or in historical and biographical reports structured by the sense of the meaning of their lives to the men with whom they were in holy relation. The entire history of the idea of virginity, for example, its advocates and interpreters, its theology and ideology, the holy acts and martyrdom of the virgins—all of it is reported by witnesses other than the virgins themselves. They were the objects of veneration to others, and the inspiration for innumerable learned

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treatises; the meaning of the dedication of their bodies was beautifully expounded and is intricately related to many other aspects of Christian doctrine. But there is no account of how it felt to be a virgin in perpetual dedication, living within the enclosed boundaries of a sacralized sexuality.

Of course, documents of women's experiences can hardly be cited if they do not exist. Professor Brown's admirable historical project of understanding sexual renunciation in late antiquity was also hampered by the narrow reference of the material which *does* exist, admittedly only a window into the lives of the elite. The vast and varied multitudes had no voice and are effectively, in the familiar phrase, "hidden from history." Historians have done the best with what they had, constructing their narratives out of limited and inadequate documentation. Professor Brown cautions the reader that his subject could be treated only with materials that are "overwhelmingly" prescriptive and theoretical, and exclusively the work of male authors. And even so learned and experienced a historian acknowledges that had he written the book ten years earlier, he would not have been able to benefit from the "chastening" effect produced by recent developments in scholarship on the religious world of women. The limitations and chasms which separate our world from that of late Roman society, the "irreducible particularity" of the ideas, are seen by Professor Brown in sharp contrast even to what must still seem to us as the considerably remote world of the High and Late Middle Ages, with evidence which seems plentiful by comparison. The "flinty soil of a long-extinct and deeply reticent world" is his scholarly portion, and he makes no claims for any abundance of material. This is not a study of the late Roman family, of pagan families in late antiquity, or of sexual practices in early Christian households. The quotations from theology, from medical and legal texts, from the arguments of the saints with one another, even Saint Augustine's eloquent confessions, are not reports of prevailing sexual and social practices even among the elite, not to mention the great masses of the illiterate and unwashed, or those nascent groups in between. There is a blankness, an insufficiency of experience that cannot be remedied. As Professor Brown observes, it is a Christianity "whose back is firmly turned toward us, untroubled by our own most urgent, and legitimate, questions." Perhaps for the "common reader" this acknowledgement is most chastening of all, for it registers the existence of whole worlds and populations whose experience eludes that variety of texts on which the "common reader" depends.

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JAMES FINN COTTER

The Persona of Sor Juana

> Myself, I'll act more wisely toward the world:
> I'll place my eyes right at my fingertips
> and only see what my two hands can feel.

WHO WAS SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ? A woman who challenged the male theologians of her day on the true nature of Christ's love, a cloistered nun who enjoyed the intimacy of New Spain's royalty, and a poet who wrote on human love as freely as she did on the divine. Born about 1648 in a Mexican village, she was one of six illegitimate children of a native Spanish mother. Juana Ramírez (her family name) managed to learn to read at the age of three, discovered her grandfather's library before she was six, and gained such a reputation as a child prodigy that at fifteen she found her way to the aristocratic court in Mexico City. At twenty she entered the convent where her learning and writings continued to win the patronage of the Viceregent, the Marquis de la Laguna, and the fond admiration of his Vicereine, the Countess de Paredes.

Sor Juana's intellectual interests included hermeticism, history, and science, as well as literature; she amassed an impressive library of her own, collected scientific instruments, wrote poems and plays, and corresponded with the literati in Spain. She had the support of her sister superiors and a number of priests, but her Jesuit confessor, Núñez de Miranda, fell out with her and would later have a heavy hand in her renouncing of literature. The Archbishop of Mexico, Aguiar y Seijas, an avowed woman-hater, took a dim view of her reputation for learning and poetry. In 1693 she stopped writing, dispersed her library, and dedicated herself to poverty and the service of others. Two years later Sister Juana died while caring for her sick nuns during an epidemic.

Let Sor Juana sum up her own story:

> Fate, was my crime of such enormity
> that, to chastise me or torment me more,
> beyond that torture which the mind foresees,
> you whisper you have yet more harm in store?
> Pursuing me with such adversity,
> you make your heartlessness only too plain:
> when you bestowed this gift of mind on me,
> you only sought to aggravate my pain.
> Bringing me applause, you stirred up envy's ire.

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Raising me up, you knew how hard I'd fall.
No doubt it was your treachery saddled me
with troubles far beyond misfortune's call,
that, seeing the store you gave me of your blessings,
no one would guess the cost of each and all. (30)

Alan Trueblood's fine translation of this sonnet, and other selected poems and prose of Sor Juana,[1] catches the dramatic flow of her verse and its personal forcefulness. The opening line, however, has a more abrupt impact in Spanish than in English: "¿Tan grande, ¡ay hado!, mi delito ha sido. . . ." Gerard Manley Hopkins employs the same startled exclamations and broken syntax in his desolation sonnets. The last line too has a Hopkinsian ring: "nadie tuviese lástima a mis males." Trueblood's decision to rhyme was the right one, but in doing so he sometimes sacrifices the unique inscape of the original. His "each and all" weakens the sense of this line: "No one takes pity on my pangs."

Sor Juana's poetry is unique, presenting a voice that sounds her own persona, and expressing a self-consciousness imbedded in and yet beyond the conventions of the baroque style. The influence of Luis de Góngora, who set the style earlier in the century, is everywhere apparent in her work. Yet she transforms the clichés of love and its complaints with the touch of simplicity and the skill of a master poet. The wand of her genius makes an ordinary compliment a metaphysical surprise, as when she leaves a line unfinished because the beautiful lady possesses,

. . . shod in gold,
a foot so comely it takes only
half a line.[2]

Sor Juana concludes a poem on the pain of an impending separation with the lines:

See how my very soul,
inviolate though it be,
yet fears lest grief invade
the precincts everlasting.
Tears and sighs dissolve
my heart and soul together,
the soul reducing to wind,
turning the heart to water.
Senseless to me as life

[1] A SOR JUANA ANTHOLOGY, trans. by *Alan S. Trueblood*, with a foreword by *Octavio Paz*. Harvard University Press. $29.50.

[2] Not in Trueblood's anthology, but quoted by Paz in his study here reviewed.

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is this life I maintain;
the only sense it knows
is nourishment for pain. (17)

Like John Donne, the poet heightens the sense of loss by picturing the ultimate separation, that of soul from body, with the soul rejoining the elements. Of course, the loss is exaggerated, but what superb hyperbole and paradox!

The same play of metaphysical conceits appears in verses employing the conventional naming of the lady's parts:

Your cheeks are April's lecture halls,
with classic lessons to impart to May:
recipes for making jasmine snowy,
formulas for redness in the rose. (8)

And she sums up the lady's beauty:

Your slender form, like the banana plant,
light as a streamer, flutters in the breeze,
its agile motion scattering abroad
a balm of aromatic fragrances.

The sensuousness, wit, and originality of these love poems spring from knowledge of poetic tradition and from eye-open attention to experience. However unusual the situation may seem—a woman praising a woman, a nun describing a Vicereine—reality or sincerity are irrelevant. The poetry holds our interest as a spellbinding performance, and dead bones live, so that an author's persona speaks to us with mind and emotion.

One of Sor Juana's favorite images is that of the portrait. The Renaissance idea of the poem as painting (*ut pictura poesis*) occurs frequently in her work with twists and turns of perspective that resemble a modern Picasso. She wonders: "Could a portrait steal breath away, / yet not with breath interact?" (12) The portrait of the Vicereine mirrors her remote self, an unapproachable soul sealed in a distant body. Art and reality interchange in the pure realm of the imagination. No wonder Sor Juana was shocked when some criticized her for writing such verses. What had they to do with the world of sin and suffering? Her poems were ideal portraits in ink:

Live on, and may thankless time
never tarnish you: may you thrive
original in perfection,
as portrait, ever alive. (11)

The poet's self-portraits take on new meaning when she accompanies a painting of herself with a poem beginning:

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My original, a woman,
sends me on to you;
though here you see her copied,
her feelings still are true.
Though converted into me,
her love remains your due. (13)

The portrait cannot speak a word and is soulless. The Countess de Paredes must lend it her own soul so that lifeless art may breathe. Just so the reader's response gives the poem its existence.

Love is never simple in Sor Juana's world. Human love must be unselfish, giving, and sacrificial. Excusing her silence, the poet explains that the absent loved one has been in her soul and she has talked to her there:

With this idea in mind,
I lived in utter delight,
pretending my subterfuge
found favor in your sight.
In this strange, ingenious fashion,
I allowed the hope to be mine
that I still might see as human
what I really conceived as divine. (5)

The divine conception echoes the Virgin Mary's love for God, imperfectly reflected in the poet's love for her beloved. Human love remains a hazy imitation of the divine. Only Christ embodies the perfect lover, human and divine, sharing his bliss but also his abandonment with mankind. The cruel suffering of his own unanswered love for humanity is something the author knows; her very need to experience his nearness increases her loneliness and pain:

The one who has power to probe
the secrets of my breast,
has seen that I am the cause
of my suffering and distress.
Well he knows that I myself
have put my desires to death—
my worries smother them,
their tomb is my own breast.
I die (who would believe it?)
at the hands of what I love best.
What is it puts me to death?
The very love I profess. (25)

The theme derives from both the Song of Songs and the Penitential Psalms, as refined by the Spanish mystics John of the Cross and

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Teresa of Avila. But Sor Juana's words reach for no such heights; they are weighted down by her own honesty and self-criticism.

Sor Juana's persona is herself. She makes no pretenses about her own sanctity and readily admits her sinfulness. Everything she writes pictures herself in unflattering terms. She admits to her pettiness and pride, ambiguity of motives and ignorance of spiritual truths. Yet she knows her place in history; she lists and describes the Christian and pagan women who have written and lived before her, poets and martyrs, teachers and queens. The author is a woman, so be it: her mind has no sex; as a virgin her body "serves only to house the soul— / you might call it neuter or abstract." (1)

Sor Juana's most eloquent self-presentation is in her *Reply to Sor Philothea*. She seems to have been maneuvered into writing an analysis of a sermon, by the Jesuit Antonio de Vieyra, printed forty years earlier. She pointed out, rightly, how out of step with the Church fathers the good priest was, and her arguments are sound. The recipient, Fernández de Santa Cruz, Bishop of Puebla, published the critique under the pseudonym of Sor Philothea. Deliberately or not, her friend the bishop set up Sor Juana for her downfall. She wrote her *Reply*, but the more she protested in her own defense, the more ammunition her detractors amassed. "I want no trouble with the Holy Office," she confessed. The advantage of secular verse meant she faced literary critics, not the Inquisition.

Sor Juana's reply explains her reluctance in writing at all: "I have never written anything of my own volition, but always at the request, and to the specifications, of others." The author saw herself as a respondent; she read and reflected, composing for her resembled conversation. She tells us composing poetry was for her more natural than writing prose. Her famous satire on men's manipulation of women obviously sprang from a witty rap session on the subject. Ironically, this piece remained the one work for which she was remembered for almost two hundred years after her death. Only in this century has her poetry regained the recognition it deserves.

Between the hagiography of Sor Juana's first biographer and a modern German critic who sees her as manic-depressive, Octavio Paz in his erudite study[3] treads a middle course, attempting to be fair to both Christian and secular interpreters. He treats everything fully: historical background, psychological motives, cultural influences. Each subject, from religious festivities to courtly love, receives its place in the sun, not as a digression but as another detail in the elaborate portrait of the woman and her time. Sor Juana disappears for pages, but when she re-emerges we have a deeper sense of her person and achievement. In Paz's portrait she stands sharply silhouetted against

[3] SOR JUANA: Or, the Traps of Faith, by *Octavio Paz*. Trans. by *Margaret Sayers Peden*. Harvard University Press. $29.95.

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the lavish backdrop of New Spain, an imposing figure of talent, a free spirit and spokeswoman of daring and insight. In restoring the poet, Paz seeks to restore the past of his native Mexico.

Paz avoids an anachronistic reading, refusing to see Sor Juana as the first colonial feminist or a modern rebel. However, he tries too hard to be all things to all persons, at times stretching his viewpoint beyond credibility. His analysis of Juana's childhood makes too much of the absent father, and the theory that "she killed him in her imagination and buried him in silence" until "her poetry exhumed him" strikes a false note. Paz bends over backwards to hedge his bets; in a typical paragraph he writes: "it is not inconceivable," "it is not illogical," and "she must have. . . ." At times he seems like a teacher talking to a listless class. The book, he tells us, grew out of a course he taught at Harvard in 1973. Undaunted by "the paucity of information," the professor plunges ahead with all the information in the world.

Paz's most controversial hypothesis tries to explain Sor Juana's final silence as a caving in to ecclesiastical pressure, not as a conversion to a more perfect imitation of Christ. Paz has no patience with pious readings of his poet's life. He may go too far in rejecting a religious viewpoint, although his presentation of the Jesuits' positive contribution to Mexican society is well-informed and generous. The truth is we shall never know for sure why Sor Juana stopped writing since she did not tell us. Her attitude toward writing, as voiced in her earlier works, makes it likely that (*pace* Paz) her renunciation was religiously motivated.

In his explications of Sor Juana's poetry, Paz proves an invaluable guide. His careful structural and source study of her masterpiece, *First Dream*, is essential for a reading of this surreal journey into self and the cosmos. This is the one poem, she stated in her *Reply*, that she wrote for herself. Here the persona turns inward to spiritual light, encounters shadow, and wakes to a sunlit world unaware of the soul's journey. Her search for knowledge ends in disappointment. Although she has failed to find a unifying pattern for the universe, the poet has created a kaleidoscopic vision of the way.

In an earlier sonnet, Sor Juana answers those who would see the world through artificially tinted glasses:

> Green allurement of our human life,
> mad Hope, wild frenzy gold-encrusted,
> sleep of the waking full of twists and turns
> for neither dreams nor treasures to be trusted;
> soul of the world, new burgeoning of the old,
> fantasy of blighted greenery,
> day awaited by the happy few,
> morrow which the hapless long to see:
> let those pursue your shadow's beckoning

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who put green lenses in their spectacles
and see the world in colors that appeal.
Myself, I'll act more wisely toward the world:
I'll place my eyes right at my fingertips
and only see what my two hands can feel. (33)

There is more virtue in knowing one's own blindness than in deceiving oneself with false hopes and fantasies. Sightless in her cloistered world, Sor Juana with her pen in hand prodded further than most. Into our present darkness, the Phoenix of New Spain rises out of the ashes.

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DICK ALLEN

Storytellers & Mystics

WHEN A LITERARY FORM IS CALLED "DEAD," contemporary works written in it have come to seem irrelevant not only to the popular audience but to the general literary community. At present, poetry in this sense is "dead." Almost all those who will read such works as *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, The Bonfire of the Vanities, A Brief History of Time*—even a collection of short stories by Angela Carter—do not buy poetry volumes or even check them out from the decreasing amount ordered by public libraries.

But the "news" in contemporary poetry is that an increasing number of excellent poets are publishing volumes that—should the general literary community become more aware of them—offer great relevancy and pleasure. Rather than being predominately autobiographical free verse lyricism, the poetry is most characteristically narrative, written from an assumed dramatic voice. Its subjects are generally outside the Self. Even more fascinating is how a number of poets are writing what I'd term "mystical vignettes": small stories or meditations that contain similar insights and information to the essays of Annie Dillard. I would have no hesitation in recommending seven of the eight volumes reviewed in this chronicle to the lawyer next door, the businesswoman up the street, the high school science teacher two blocks over.

Unbelievable as it may sound, we even have a leading poet writing epics. Frederick Turner, former editor of *The Kenyon Review*, has published his second epic poem in four years.[1] His first, *The New World*, was scoffed at by many critics, yet defended by others drawn to its absorbing plot, characters, and fascinating philosophical concepts. His second, *Genesis*—told through a persona, dealing with the terraforming of Mars—is equally outrageous in its science fiction basis. Although it lacks *The New World*'s unflagging forward motion adventure, *Genesis* is richer in its wealth of ideas and its translating of scientific and technological concepts. A slow reading of it deeply enriches readers' comprehension of Beauty and human purpose—Turner's obsessive concerns. In its telling of a future struggle between those who would have us abandon much technology for the sake of the planet's survival, and those who would use technology to push the human race on, Turner has brought fictional life to one of the world's most significant debates.

[1] GENESIS, by *Frederick Turner*. Saybrook Publishing Co. $19.95; $9.95.

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It was both *The New World*'s use of a popular genre for its background and its line-by-line art that critics scorned. Many have a knee-jerk reaction to science fiction and fantasy (currently called "magic realism" by some who would avoid the label) as well as to poetry which contains large swaths of plot and information. For them, lyric poetry is the only "true" poetry. They forget that almost all epics, like *The Divine Comedy* and *The Odyssey*, would be called science fiction or fantasy if they were published today, and that these epics cannot be well evaluated with twentieth-century critical approaches meant primarily for the lyric.

In *Genesis*, Turner's art is up to the enormous task of writing an epic. His style and sensibility are such that we find ourselves thinking of course poetry can communicate large concepts, of course it can wed the philosophic with the imagistic, of course its scientific and lyric passages can be one and the same. Turner takes this so much for granted that we feel ourselves doing likewise. His incremental style and the unflagging bravado which sometimes makes his essays and jacket blurbs combinations of naive optimism and frenetic insight have been tamed by the restrictions of the iambic pentameter he uses with mastery here, as well as by his self-imposed restriction of writing exactly 10,000 lines, in five Acts, composed of five scenes apiece, each of 400 lines. And in addition to accepting the branching and collapsing wave pattern structure of *Genesis*' composition ("And before that, and before that, were choices / Each of which sprung a branch of the green Time") we find that Turner is almost as much a pastoral poet as an epic one. Here, for instance, is a passage from a scene called "The Fall of Chance":

> Alpheus before dawn; a swart star slides
> On the water; a smell of elderberries,
> Distant hayfields, smoke and olive trees;
> Dry reeds rattling in the light morning breeze . . .
> . . . . . A nightingale
> Is winding up its song; a milky light
> As fresh as porcelain begins to glow.
> Three miles up the river there's a shallow ford
> Where the flow bubbles over pebblestones
> And here he strikes off to the south.

These passages are frequently woven easily into the epic, as are meditations such as this one:

> So freedom is the breath of the tradition.
> And there's no freedom in the present moment,
> But for the flash of play, irrelevant,
> That turns us to a discipline of years;
> Freedom is ages long, not seconds long;

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Time is the medium of liberty,
And time is made by art's and love's delays,
The slow crafts of the spirit's history.

And his inclusion of science:

If we could take this path a little further
We'd find those silicates and carbonates
To be compacted ash of burnt-out stars;
The nuclei themselves cooked up inside
The crushing fusion of their white-white cores;
Their particles the frozen motes of light
That burst in nightmare from the primal atom.

I quote these sections to emphasize the *art* of *Genesis*, its careful and loving construction. The story itself, based upon current scientific data, contains—as we might wish—a rebellion of Mars colonists; the struggle of a particularly vividly-drawn hero-warrior, Tripitaka; an epic battle in space; the search for genetic blueprints; heroes; heroines; tough adversaries; a sibyl. Turner has found a way—via science fiction—to wonder and awe. As no other contemporary poet, he has folded societal, cultural, technological, scientific, and philosophical dimensions into a work which also contains, as only poetry can, the time and place compressions and shiftings of connotative, imagistic language.

David Dooley likewise eschews the autobiographical lyric. His *The Volcano Inside*, winner of the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize, is a collection of twenty-two narrative vignettes.[2] Many voices speak, from the profane writer of "How I Wrote It" ("Writing means getting your hands dirty, / writing means getting filthy all over. . . .") who maintains "The grime on a tenement is as beautiful as the sunrise," to the fortuneteller of "The Reading" ("My first husband was redheaded, / and one day he up and de-camped with a blonde but brown at the roots / divorcee from down the street, and me with six kids"). We hear the pot-drenched thoughts of a woman watching cartoons and waiting for her first love to come home: "You know the idea of a man turning into a spider / and climbing up buildings was dumb and kind of repulsive / if you stopped to think about it . . ." and the movie director of "Take Five" ("I know it's really a workboat, / but say your line anyway, darling, half the audience / will think it really is a houseboat, and the rest will think / I'm a bloody genius for having you say it's a houseboat . . .").

Dooley listens to and illuminates the lives of scorned lovers, the husband of a dying woman, a forlorn minister, a jogger. We eaves-

[2] THE VOLCANO INSIDE, by *David Dooley*. Story Line Press. $8.00p.

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drop on a tragically mundane conversation in "Father," hear the would-be country songwriter in "Weasels Ripped My Flesh." But we also participate in such moments as are found in the simple closure of "Sunbathing in Syracuse" when "the old men drank their sweet sodas and set up the chessboard / arranging their white and black, / enjoying the light and coolness of the summer air."

The form is free verse, most characteristically presented by a four-beat-long line. The content is realistic and unflinching: no romanticism here. Rather, we have absorbing, sometimes jazz-rhythmed, image-rich stories when we can hear "that divinest of sounds, poet's laughter" and, when Dooley is in a gentler mood, even know how "angelic beings possess us on cool March days."

Linda Bierds also does not draw all into the Self. As demonstrated by *The Stillness, the Dancing*, she is a premier poet of description.[3] Her carefully made lines and vignettes, with their abundance of images, their subtle shifts and turnings, darkenings and lightenings, are a pleasure to follow. Although it is always in the tone of the poet that we hear, the language mediated through Bierds's fine sensibility, she does take on other voices. The experiences she relates, many of them taking place in the colder regions of the world, present us with intensifications. In "The Klipsan Stallions," we hear the story of the stallions swimming out to rescue sailors from a wrecked ship. As the sailors grab the stallions' tails, we swim back with them:

> . . . the haunches
> pulled, left then right, and the small circles
> of underhooves stroked up in unison. Here
> was the sound of sharp breathing, troubled
> with sea spray, like bellows left out in the rain,
> and here the texture of sand on the belly,
> on the shirt and thigh, on the foot
> with its boot, and the naked foot—and then, finally,
> the voices, the dozens gathered to
> cheer the rescue, the long bones of the will,
> causing heads to close over those rippling tails,
> yellow teeth to close over the timothy.

There are other stories of wonder, of the marvelous "Child in the Wagon" who remembers the sound of "leaves that clicked down the cobblestones / like the toenails of running dogs" and "the swirl of madrona leaves" as her Conestoga wagon rides away from civilization and how her parents, out in the wild, try to reproduce the sounds for her: ". . . like this? her mother whispers, / clinking knives to a pewter

[3] THE STILLNESS, THE DANCING, by *Linda Bierds*. An Owl Book/Henry Holt and Co. $10.95p.

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cup." The tour de force of "Pearl" takes us into a mine and returns us, "lifted . . . lifting . . . past the shale beds, / limestone, from the rain into the rain . . . / and here is that moon, swelling to meet them— / old ghost, old platter of steam— / and here is the world of the world." Or we are with "The Neon Artist in December": "a light that has never been / curls up through the century—swank, / incredibly still. / *Our times*, he laughs. . . ." Bierds's collection is one of paintings, capturings of both historical and present times she stills and then lovingly releases into our lives.

A wilder poet, one of great virtuosity and dazzle, Lucie Brock-Broido is undeniably a major new voice. *A Hunger* is a book based on the premises of mysticism and the soul's continual rebirth:[4]

> In thrice 10,000 seasons, I will come back to this world
> In a white cotton dress. Kingdom of After My Own Heart.
> Kingdom of Fragile. Kingdom of Dwarves. When I come home,
> Teacups will quiver in their Dresden saucers, pentatonic chimes
> Will move in wind. A covey of alley cats will swarm on the side
> Porch & perch there, portents with quickened heartbeats
> You will feel against your ankles as you pass through.

This first stanza, from "Domestic Mysticism," only gives a small indication of the wonders in this amazing pronouncement.

Elsewhere, Brock-Broido, obsessed as much with fire as Bierds is with ice, takes us travelling to "Ohio & Beyond" when "The first warm night hangs / on the eaves of the dancehall, drops / down to the wooden floorboards, settles / in the avocado vinyl of the front porch swing," and gives us this vibrant passage from "Autobiography:" "I love that hands-on, / Die-while-you're-dark-haired-still / & young, fists curled to desire, / Take Me kind of love." She convincingly makes us feel the death of Marilyn Monroe in "And So Long, I've Had You Fame," spellbinds us with "I Wish You Love" with its mixture of the mundane ("After a death in the family / Gadgets go wrong for awhile") and the terrible ("This morning, half of the Rhine was declared biologically dead. / By nightfall, the eels will be floating face up toward Germany"), gives us poems partially based on the lives of basketball player Manute Bol, the Gibbons sisters, a girl archaeologist, Birdie Africa (one of the survivors of the 1985 Philadelphia fire-bombing). Much of the book is magical, as when we learn "What the Whales Sound Like in Manhattan": "blue and unpossessable" with "a sound that tips the gryphons on the tops / of buildings, one that spreads the concrete wings // of gargoyles. . . ."

Her only major failure in *A Hunger* is "Jessica, from the Well" in which she enters the Being (as only a mystic might presume to do) of

[4] A HUNGER, by *Lucie Brock-Broido*. Alfred A. Knopf. $16.95; $8.95.

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that Texas child whose rescue so captivated the nation, and emotes and observes to a ridiculous extent: "Take, for instance, my right leg / which, by midnight, I have accidentally wedged / in a notorious and irredeemable position." Jessica has a line, "Sometimes my imagination gets to running wild" and we can't help but associate it with Brock-Broido who, at her weakest, can be self-indulgent and frivolous, shoes flying off as she tapdances.

The pleasures of reading poetry, however, are not confined to grand sweeps, passions and bedazzlements, and so it is a pleasure of a quieter kind to pick up *The Apple That Astonished Paris*, by Billy Collins.[5] The volume is a collection of highly accessible poems, delightful in their wit, friendly lines, odd juxtapositions: "But here I am at the vanishing point, / looking back at everything as it zooms toward me." Collins takes us with him, a wry grin on his face, to places like "Schoolsville" which is "nestled in a paper landscape, / chalk dust flurrying down in winter / night dark as a blackboard" where "Once in a while a student knocks on the door / with a term paper fifteen years late / or a question about Yeats or double-spacing."

We have clever poems on poetry, one giving students good instructions ("walk inside the poem's room / and feel the walls for a light switch //. . . . But all they want to do / is tie the poem to a chair with rope / and torture a confession out of it") and another, "Poem," self-deprecating: "Such is often the case with poems / afflicted by the same plain title / as this one: / a sign by the road announcing a bump." We chuckle over "Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in the House" when a barking dog heard outside while the narrator tries to listen to music continues when the record stops, in his "famous barking dog solo."

Collins often prides himself on being lost, is obsessed with maps, and tries to capture "moments that have no role in any story, / worthless to a biographer, but mysterious / and rivaling the colors of the present." Finally, though, it is the humor that most remains with us. In "Child Development" we hear children make up names like "You Dumb Goopyhead / You Big Sewerface" and then, surprisingly as the fancy turns, though "The mature save their hothead invective/ for things" they know "their bosses are Big Fatty Stupids, / their wives are Dopey Dopeheads / and that they themselves are Mr. Sillypants." This is a book of irrepressible delight.

Another kind of alternate poetry is written by Michael Palmer. But his sixth book, *Sun*, is basically only a collection of words and fragments, dull surrealism signifying nothing—the kind of poetry young poets often bring to a creative writing class and read aloud to

[5] THE APPLE THAT ASTONISHED PARIS, by *Billy Collins*. University of Arkansas Press. $12.95; $8.95.

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mystify others, then endlessly explain (or keep smugly quiet about).[6] The book consists of six fragmented poems, so slight they could have been composed in one night's typing. Here are a few passages:

> Who's one and who's nothing
> in the game she asked
> I couldn't understand the rest

and,

> I killed a bee on the Street of Scissors
> The bee was holding a picture of me

and,

> I ate all the food in the world
> and left people hungry
>
> All these stories are the same
> There is only one story—
>
> but not really—
> so I swallowed the corn and all was well

But why continue? This is trivial, nonsense "poetry," no matter how buoyed up by theory. It comes along every decade or so—the latest manifestation being "Language Poetry"—and is popular among poetasters: Hey, look Ma, I can write *poetry*! The stuff is pretentious, anything of slight importance in it having been communicated by Wallace Stevens or even T.S. Eliot long ago. Unfortunately, *Sun* is printed on acid-free paper.

It's a relief to turn to Karen Brennan's first poetry collection, *Here on Earth*.[7] Brennan, like Lucie Brock-Broido, writes from a mystic's comprehension, but without Brock-Broido's wild flights of fancy. Consequently, Brennan's poetry is firmer. Its vignettes are simply and beautifully presented: "A beautiful way of looking at something starts at the throat. . . . Forming a context / like the mathematical perfection of walls in the living room, / an angular certain fireplace, the blaze like triangle after / shifting triangle." In her volume, "this is what we love, / the sheer terrible irony of every performance / and how we can alter things / by just clapping along or squinting //. . . . the horizon simply *was*— / no longing there, but a wealth of enigma / defying even the bravest among us."

[6] SUN, by *Michael Palmer*. North Point Press. $9.95p.
[7] HERE ON EARTH, by *Karen Brennan*. Wesleyan University Press. $17.00; $8.95.

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In such poems as "Nijinsky at the Windshield," "Not Nearly Enough," "What's Missing" and "Florida" are are given tenderness and grace and beauty, the possible impossibilities of mystical vision. "Irresistibly, the Heart Opens," Brennan writes, and young girls "*were beautiful in our odd ways*" and young boys slid down mud rock "caring for nothing but / the particular moment of sliding, the touch/ of muscle to water, the wild leaving of space—." There is "The Wondrousness of Light and Other Problems" when "Last night my daughter explained her method / for inventing stories, *just pretend / it's a dream you're having, imagine you're / having a dream. . . .*," a poem with a characteristic Brennan closure:

> On the other side of the lake
> a row of cottages, and the moon's watery rise.
> Already the skaters are leaving,
> leaving the most delicate etchings on a surface
> composed of the most delicate molecular responses.

Phillis Levin's first book, *Temples and Fields*, is equally fine, an austere, chiseled volume containing formal poems and other poems so carefully constructed they feel formal.[8] Like Brennan, she has a poem on skaters and in it brings forth mysteries out of the ordinary: "On land, what they decipher would mean less / Than a spider's web glistening in frost. // Just as we part, the half-sun silhouettes / Two figures sailing close until they miss." We travel on the "long night train from Nice to Rome," weave in and out of shadows (Levin's favorite word) or experience "Chalk and Ash":

> My mouth is ash, my body chalk, and I
> Have come this night to leave you what I am:
> Thirst and hunger for things you want to know,
> Chalk and ashes for things you have to say.
> You shall taste chalk and ash every day.

Levin's taut lines show us that "Everything has a History," as when a chair is found, carried home, becomes a new thing and "Now I sit here remembering / There was a moment of love / Between myself and the place I inhabit." We have the gifting tribute of "Rilke's Nightfall," the near perfect classicism of the small poem "Winter Sculpture," the hearing of "Where what was familiar / Will suddenly filter / Through voices through rain." All is change, as in "Out of Chaos" when "Today I saw the usual human disaster: / Head in her chest, legs pocked with pink wounds, / Fingers wrapped tight around a white handbag." Levin ends the poem:

[8] TEMPLES AND FIELDS, by *Phillis Levin*. University of Georgia Press. $13.95; $6.95.

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And everywhere one looks
A pre-Socratic flux
Streams down avenues
Of taxicabs and radios,
Mortality's parade crowned with neon and chrome—

As if we were beasts evolving toward a sentence
That breaks and disperses before we arrive
At the city we promised to build.

In "The Border Guard," the guard has found "there is a loose thread / That unravels under my careful eye" for "I stand at attention, ready / To remind whoever forgets there is / A ratio of authority, a limit, a line." Although love is not what the border guard is after, and nothing "Can change my posture," there are transformations to be seen, "Brilliant and hard to grasp as distant gods. // Yes, everywhere are signs of transcendence / Bargains, eternities, death throes, beasts." There is strength and authority in this book, so much sheer intelligence and craft it is a virtual certainty that these centered poems will anchor hard, determined, and important ones to come. Levin's poetry is a sure sign that as New Formalism separates from Confessionalism, it again and again can give us crystal meditations when the horsemen pass by.

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DEAN FLOWER

Ingmar Bergman's Autobiography in Film

In the spring of 1948 Ingmar Bergman moved his family into a five-room apartment outside of Gothenberg. At this point in his career he had directed four undistinguished films, written scripts for three other (more successful) films, and was in his third year as director of the Gothenberg Civic Theater. His family consisted of his second wife, Ellen, their daughter Eva (3), son Jan (2), and newborn twins Anna and Mats. In addition his oldest daughter Lena (5) was living with them because Bergman's first wife, Else, was in a sanitarium with tuberculosis. Ellen and Ingmar argued bitterly about money. Ellen's mother and young half-brother moved in as well, since Ellen's stepfather had just committed suicide, leaving heavy debts. Installed on the other side of a thin partition, Bergman's mother-in-law could be heard grieving long into the night. Rounding out the jolly *ménage* to a total of ten persons was a servant whom Bergman labels, in his recent autobiography, "a kindly but gloomy person."[1] One can see why.

Bergman seems to have reacted with characteristic (if not entirely admirable) energy to his domestic predicament: he continued to throw himself into his work (as he always did), writing plays and films furiously, and editing scripts. He also took a room in a Stockholm boarding house, where he could make love with whomever he liked. "I was not happy in Gothenberg," he explains. Its theater was such "a limited world." And, after all, how could he live at home? "Home seethed with crying children, damp washing, weeping women and raging scenes of jealousy, often perfectly justified." One can only wonder at the tone of such matter-of-fact language. Lost in translation from the Swedish, perhaps. "Obsessed with a sexuality that forced me into constant infidelity," he writes, "I was tormented by desire, fear, anguish and a guilty conscience." But what could he do—he was *forced*. His conscience was guilty, but never so guilty as to make him change. Bergman frequently acknowledges in these memoirs the shame and confusion, the anger and compulsiveness of his earlier self. But that person remains a stranger to him. "I do not recognize the person I was forty years ago," he says. He seldom attempts, in this book full of harsh personal revelations, to confess or apologize or even express remorse, and he has no interest in self-analysis. Unlike

[1] THE MAGIC LANTERN: An Autobiography, by *Ingmar Bergman*. Trans. by *Joan Tate*. Viking. $19.95.

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his film protagonists, Bergman seems quite untormented by his guilt. "I wanted so very much to be Prospero," he says simply, "and mostly behaved like Caliban."

Perhaps it was Caliban who devised for him the following marriage scenario: he married Else Fisher in 1943, betrayed her with Ellen Lundström whom he married in 1945, left her for Gun Hagberg whom he married in 1951, betrayed her with Harriet Andersson in 1952, who was eventually replaced by Bibi Andersson in 1955, who was then replaced by Käbi Laretei whom he married in 1959, who was replaced by Liv Ullmann in 1965, who left him and was replaced by Ingrid von Rosen, whom he married in 1971. Most of these women were artists and performers like himself—dancer, choreographer, journalist, actress, pianist. Several of them left husbands and children to marry him. Many of them bore him children (nine, all told). Wives and mistresses both seem to have remained good friends with him, after the divorces and separations. But one wonders what he felt, at the time, about all of these women? When Gun discovered his affair with Harriet and immediately sought a divorce, Bergman remembers, "I was amazed by her splendid rage, which I had never seen before." As if to say, "What an actress!"

The autobiography offers many glimpses but tells us little about Bergman's capacity for love. And that may be what he felt: besides sexual desire, very little. He said in 1950, explaining the difference between his two vocations, "The theater is like a loyal wife, film is the big adventure, the expensive and demanding mistress—you worship both, each in its own way."[2] One can see now what he really meant. And I suspect Bergman's wives and mistresses knew it only too well. His real passion was for his work, not them. It always came first, and remained separate. He describes this once in the autobiography as "a steel column right through the ramshackle ruins of my soul." He never tells of remorse or despair or wretchedness at the end of a relationship. Instead he says, "We didn't have anything to say to each other."

Bergman's preferred woman, whether actress or wife, is "unneurotic." Indeed, that is one of his highest terms of praise for anyone. It means, especially, the opposite of guilty. Here is how he describes Gun Hagberg as she was in 1949, when they went off to Paris together for three reckless months of unwedded bliss. She was his archetypal unneurotic woman:

> She knew nothing about herself, wasn't interested, had faced her life openly with no defences or subsidiary intentions, truthfully and unafraid. She ignored the stomach ulcer which periodically flamed up . . . it soon improved. She didn't mind her poor relationship with her husband; all marriages become dull sooner or later and a little salve rescues sex life. Nor did she reflect on her recurring anxiety

[2] See Birgitta Steene, *Ingmar Bergman: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston, 1987), p. 190.

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> dreams; perhaps she had eaten something that didn't agree with her or drunk too much. Life was matter of fact and magnificent. She was irresistible.

It's curious how well this description fits Bergman himself, at least as he willed himself to be, the persona he adopted as director, the mask he wears as autobiographer.

Equally curious is that this self derives from his conception of the female. He says that Gun was his model (and Eva Dahlbeck her "interpreter") for such figures as Marianne in *A Lesson in Love* (1954) and Desirée Armfeldt in *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955). She, or rather what she represents, can be seen much earlier of course. *To Joy* (1950), for example, which Bergman says is a thinly-disguised story of himself and Ellen, opposes the female, "a miracle of beauty, faithfulness, wisdom and human dignity," (played by Maj-Britt Nilsson) with the male, "a conceited mediocrity; faithless, bombastic and a liar." But this is surely also a parable of himself: the maleness he would curse and escape, the female he would idealize, identify with, and become. Later (and much more problematic) enactments of this division in himself would eliminate the male figure almost completely. In both *The Silence* (1963) and *Persona* (1966) two women would act out his conflicts, with an adolescent boy (Ingmar, surely) in the foreground taking everything in. Bergman said in 1968 that Ester, the neurotic-intellectual sister in *The Silence*, "could just as well have been a man. In fact, in my original draft, she *was* a man."[3]

Unneurotic was what Bergman wanted all his performers to be. The autobiography repeats stories he has been telling for years about the uncomplicated fun of making films and plays: about his troupe at the Malmö City Theater, whose creative intensity was "completely unneurotic . . . a shear joy . . . robust, direct, concrete, substantial, sensual";[4] about the "euphoric light-heartedness" of making *Summer with Monika* (1951), where a little gang of actors had an idyllic vacation by the sea and Harriet Andersson "radiated . . . uninhibited erotic charm";[5] about the playful, anxiety-free filmings of *The Seventh Seal* and *The Magician*; about the necessity of working with actors who are stable and strong, close-knit as a happy family ("because they have to *play* neurotics, they should not *be* neurotics");[6] and about the "powerful erotic business" of filming itself, where—in Bergman's latest formulation of this principle—"mutual exposure is total" and the camera's "magical eye" makes possible "intimacy, devotion, depen-

[3] *Bergman on Bergman: Interviews with Ingmar Bergman*, by Stig Björkman et al. (New York, 1973), p. 19.

[4] *Bergman on Bergman*, p. 116.

[5] *Bergman on Bergman*, p.75. See also Peter Cowie, *Ingmar Bergman: A Critical Biography* (New York, 1982), pp. 100–104.

[6] John Simon, "Conversation with Bergman," in *Ingmar Bergman Directs* (New York, 1972), p. 18.

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dency, love, confidence and credibility." All the things that were impossible in his marriages, that he never felt as a child and failed to provide as a husband and father, he made possible "in the warm, possibly illusory security" of the cinema. The familial theme is unmistakable. As a director, Bergman sought to become his ideal father, just as he had sought in all his marriage scenarios to identify himself with the ideal female and mother.

Perhaps the most interesting stories in *Magica Lanterna* (the autobiography's Swedish title) concern Bergman's childhood, his mother who was fearful of Ingmar's dependency and withheld intimacy, his pastor-father who humiliated and punished him; his elder brother, whom he once tried to murder; his younger sister, whose writing ambitions he silenced forever. Then there is his Uncle Carl, a mad inventor whose chronic urinomania (he couldn't resist drenching himself) Bergman recalls sympathetically, an act of both self-punishment and defiance. Or again there is Aunt Alla, with her deep voice and thick eyeglasses, who one day joined nine-year-old Ingmar in the bathtub and held him firmly between her soft thighs. Thus early did he learn the secrets of women. Later there was a summer with the chaste Märta, who listened in silence to his angry atheism, a verbal seduction that led nowhere; and still later there was ugly big-breasted Anna, whose mother slapped Ingmar when she caught them copulating (which they did regularly) and whose foul-tempered lover hit him even harder in a later lurid episode. All this was preparation for the violent scene when Ingmar struck his father and left home for good at seventeen, unable to make amends or even speak to his parents for decades.

But the autobiography does make amends. It begins and ends with affectionate stories of his parents, the memory of his mother in 1965, storming angrily to his theater to rebuke him, and the long reconciling talk they had; and then the memory of an idyllic bicycle trip he took as a child with his father, visiting remote country churches. But these narratives remind us that Bergman has already made amends in his art: the final scene of *Wild Strawberries* (1957), for example, when old Isak Borg has a peaceful vision of his parents on a distant shore, and he acknowledges their happy waves and smiles, fully anticipates what he says here. Uncannily, this film foreshadows Bergman's career and its conflicts, creating in Borg (played by the aging film director Victor Sjöström) a self who is punished and learns to forgive. Similarly, in *Winter Light* (1963), Bergman had re-created his preacher-father Erik in the character of Tomas Eriksson, the despairing pastor whose failures in love—like those of his son—are relieved finally by his sudden determination at the end to pursue his calling in spite of everything. In an odd way, these cinematic apologies are warmer and fuller than anything Bergman manages to say in the autobiography. Touched by his mother's angry scene in 1965, he still notices that she performed it "with considerable skill," and at her

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deathbed finds himself staring meaninglessly at the Band-Aid on her finger, unable to declare what he feels.

It is very much an autobiography of pictures: episodes, fables, vignettes, quick glimpses, images, occasionally just a montage of phrases. Bergman as usual does not want to explain or interpret, or at least he tries not to. His manner of storytelling seldom suggests any documentary accuracy, not even that of a family album of photographs. These pictures come from his private store of dreams and memories, images have been worn down to essentials by many repetitions, fictions obsessively constructed to make a point or enact a settled notion or evoke some old petrified moment, a mystery that will not dissolve or a secret that remains hidden and sacred. They suggest, inevitably, Strindbergian dreams, or fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen, or Kafka parables and enigmas, or scenes by Edvard Munch. The following isolated paragraph, for example, is about an actor just before he goes onstage:

> Many years ago I saw a friend standing in a corner, dressed and made-up. He had chewed his lower lip so that blood was running down his chin and he had froth in the corners of his mouth. He was shaking his head, I'm not going on, I'm not going on. Then he went on.

Or here is how Bergman narrates part of his recurring dream of a city, a Berlin-which-is-not-Berlin. He says he tried to re-create this dream three times in his films, and never succeeded:

> a stage setting, a boundless unwieldy city of smoke-blackened monumental buildings . . . then at last I come to the river. They are winching up a dead horse as large as a whale out of which water is pouring on to the pavement. Curiosity and terror drive me on. I must get there in time for the public executions. Then I meet my dead wife. We embrace each other tenderly and look for a hotel room where we can make love.

Bergmaniacs can splice this onto scenes from the hotel room in *The Silence* (1963) or keep walking on the surreal dream-street of *The Serpent's Egg* (1977) or go back to the one where Borg meets his dead self at the beginning of *Wild Strawberries*.

Bergman's pleasant memories have just as much of this fabulous aura as the disturbing ones. Typically one of them begins, "On the road up to the station was a blacksmith's forge whose occupier looked like a Mongol chieftain. He was married to a still beautiful but exhausted woman called Helga." And so on, every story as timeless and elemental as *The Virgin Spring*. Has any of his critics yet appreciated how many stories Bergman has conjured up over the years? Perhaps the most outlandish one in the autobiography, offered as gospel truth, should be called The Adventure of the Body in the

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Mortuary. Ten-year-old Ingmar is locked in and left alone by Algot, the grotesque caretaker who has frightened him with stories of death throes, flatulent corpses and living death. The boy is drawn to a sheeted body, uncannily warm, the apparent corpse of a young woman. He lifts the sheet and wants to touch her sex. "Then I saw she was watching me from under her half-lowered eyelids." Terror, exit, cut. Was it a traumatic episode or pure yarn? In any case Bergman drew on stories like this for numerous images of terrifying dead-live bodies in his films, from the attic scene in *The Magician* to the hospital-mortuary imagery at the start of *Persona* to the bodily nightmares of *Hour of the Wolf*, the cries and whispers of *Cries and Whispers* and the grotesque marionette magic at the end of *Fanny and Alexander*. He is deadly serious about such events, which is why they make such good stories:

> Ghosts, devils and demons, good, evil or just annoying, they have blown in my face, pushed me, pricked me with pins, plucked at my jersey. They have spoken, hissed or whispered. Clear voices, not particularly comprehensible but impossible to ignore.

Bergman's deepest fascination is with the disparity between words and acts. His films close relentlessly in upon rationalizers and self-deceivers, unconscious hypocrites and wordy intellectuals, people burdened by conventional fictions of themselves and only dimly aware of their real feelings. His camera in close-up interrogates their anxious eyes and nervous mouths, exposing their anger and longing—think of the pain and rage of Liv Ullmann's face or the cowardice and uneasy bluff of Erland Josephson in *The Marriage Scenarios*, recall the fierce strength of Max von Sydow's skull together with his vulnerable eyes and childlike smile in *Shame* or *A Passion*—or recall the drawn face of Ingrid Thülin in so many films, weary with unspoken tension, or remember the inarticulate Gunnar Björnstrand as the doubting Tomas trying to preach in *Winter Light*, or Bibi Andersson as the nurse in *Persona* telling nervous fictions about her marriage plans, or Ingrid Bergman, a picture of guilty conscience, telling a mother's lies in *Autumn Sonata*.

Bergman has spoken often of his fascination with the human face: "I dig for secret expressions and relations that we hide," he said once.[7] But he seldom speaks without ambivalence about words. Words represent what he distrusts most in himself, his power to lie and persuade and deceive. His autobiography is an incomplete revelation of that conflict in himself. He recalls with shame the lying stories he told as a child, the whippings he earned, the hypocrite he became. He conceives the source of all dishonesty in himself to be verbal. Yet writing was how he made his way into the profession, and how he

[7] Charles Thomas Samuels, "Ingmar Bergman: An Interview" in *Ingmar Bergman: Essays in Criticism* (New York, 1975), p. 121.

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continues to succeed, inventing virtually *all* his own scripts since *Secrets of Women* in 1952, some 30 films in all, each fully written before any footage was shot.[8] Yet he still remarks, "artists who are clever with words are a hazard."

He dreamed recently of making "a break with the talkies" and devising a film about "an anonymous old maker of silent films" which would itself be a silent film. Bergman knows well that in Revelations, when the seventh seal was broken, "there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." Never was a filmmaker more enamored of the idea of silence than Bergman. He associates it with serenity, deliverance, and peace. But it is misleading of him to suggest, as he so often does, that silence is eloquent and pure, speech bombastic and ugly. His films concern a much more complex truth. They are no less about words than silences. Recall the scene in *Persona* (a virtual allegory of silence vs. speech) when Alma narrates a long sensuous story of libidinous freedom by the sea. Bergman makes the listening Elizabet and her absorption in this story stand for our own. Words are made so powerful here, they replace pictures. I've known many a viewer who claims to remember the scene Alma narrates as if Bergman had in fact filmed it. So too with Bergman's eloquent faces. The cinematic energy comes from our being able to listen to the words as we watch the faces. Even though the words are in subtitles, we hear their eloquent tones (dubbed Bergmans are disastrous) and we are compelled to read avidly. Think too of how many stories are told within the stories of Bergman films, dreams narrated, memories brought to life with voice-over, marriage partners giving their histories to interviewers (talking heads, of all dull things, made gripping), actors commenting on the characters they perform (*A Passion*), television sets producing commentary, letters and diaries revealing secrets, literary allusions made resonant, books read from. Recall the following passage which Alma reads aloud in *Persona* and consider whether Bergman really puts no trust in words:

> "All in anxiety we carry with us, our blighted dreams, the inexpressible cruelty, our anguish at the thought of death, the painful realization of our earthly state, have slowly crystallized our hope of salvation. The cries of our faith and doubt are one of the most terrible proofs of our desolation and our awareness."

The words were written of course by Bergman. As his autobiography newly attests, he can't live with them and he can't live without them.

[8] Bergman also wrote the scripts for seven films directed by others, and wrote at least eight other adaptations of stories, plays, and novels for films he directed.

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GEORGE KEARNS

History and Games

POSTMODERN FICTION: *Tristram Shandy* and *Finnegans Wake* are among its Lares and Penates, Gödel's Theorem and the Möbius strip its ministering angels; "classic realism" (*hiss*!) its market-oriented sibling, Bush-supporting here, Thatcherite there; the computer virus is an anarchist black-sheep cousin for whom it maintains a jealous admiration. It hangs out in cafés with French Theory, yet, generally Left in sentiment, is not unwilling to drop by popular bars frequented by Science Fiction. In some moods—or if you listen to the fans, its fiction/faction—it is megalomaniacal in its claims to destructive powers or, for all its irrationality, to be an avatar of the Enlightenment. In mellower moods it will say it's just playing a game. Characteristically male, it has been known to show up as "Angela Carter." Easily shrugging off rear-guard humanist attacks such as John Gardner's *On Moral Fiction*, it winces when reminded of Annie Dillard's barbed, "unlicensed metaphysics in a teacup."

It has had its share of successes, some almost of popularity, with Borges and Calvino, the Nabokov of *Pale Fire* and *Ada*, the Beckett of *The Lost Ones* and *Company*, the García Márquez of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the Rushdie of *Midnight's Children* and *Satanic Verses*. It foregrounds acts of writing and narrative manipulation, creates anti-worlds and uncertain ontologies, produces Chinese Box effects in which the inner may contain the outer, invents characters who may be imagining their authors, and so on. For readers of fiction, all of postmodernism's tricks and procedures have been long on display, as domesticated now as its erstwhile adversaries, realism and modernism, ever were. Not surprisingly, it's as easy to find a conventional, didactic, tiresome postmodern novel as it is to find unreadable fictions in any other mode, and just as rare to discover one with textual charm and energy. Which brings me to two distinctly postmodern European novels that produce authentic magic in very different ways.

Lars Gustafsson's *Bernard Foy's Third Castling* is trinitarian, three tales and one, written in varying styles and registers. The reader is allowed the privileged position of a god stripped of interpretive omniscience, observing bits of narrative, language, and personality turn up and recombine unpredictably among stories of three Bernard

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Foys who live in Sweden in 1983.[1] The second Bernard (an octogenarian poet poised on the edge of Baudelairean abyss) wonders about an

> upsetting feeling that he wasn't able to be the same person all the time. Could that be connected with Alzheimer's disease? Or perhaps he'd always been this way? There are times when he feels like an entire busload of people. Except for the peculiar circumstance that not all the passengers occupy the same landscape at the same time.

The first Bernard is a young Texan, a Conservative rabbi with a Swedish congregation. He has come to see that the Swedish reaction to his profession "wasn't due to any kind of anti-Semitism; it was just that any indication that people had a religious life put them into a state of frozen affability."

He is on his way to Paris for a job interview at a fashionable Parisian synagogue presided over by an Irish rabbi whose name forms a homograph with that other inventor of sinister fantasy, Charles Williams. In Gustafsson's world, this might well be Charles Williams come back to us, for someone resembling Baudelaire presides over a gambling den above the Parisian arcades once frequented by the author of *Les Fleurs du mal*, and Walter Benjamin, who spent so many years studying Baudelaire and the arcades, shows up as an old shopkeeper. The young rabbi has innocently stumbled into the familiar clap-trap of a spy plot, complete with KGB, evil industrialists and a Nazi monster returned from the dead. This is a Hitchcock movie shadowed by Pynchon-like global paranoia and interleaved with Vidocq's *Mysteries of Paris*. Gustafsson is equally a master of the international espionage plot itself and of the deadpan send-up of the genre. Will Rabbi Foy be able to thwart the "morally and humanly degenerate programmers" working in an abandoned mercury mine in Mexico, risking nuclear apocalypse in their plot to send "some awful paralysis throughout the Soviet war monster's horrendous, ice-cold soul"? There is a splendid denouement in a zeppelin. We soon find another zeppelin (or the same?), Nobile's *Italia* of 1928 on its doomed voyage to the arctic, floating through the memory of the second Bernard Foy, where it becomes an image of lost purity, a road not taken.

He is an aged Swedish poet, long unvisited by the Muse, who has written the thriller that brought the rabbinical Foy through Gothic space from Stockholm to Paris to Mexico. Nothing we know about this mediocre poet who has lived long enough to become a monument suggests that he could possibly have written that thriller. Meta-author

[1] BERNARD FOY'S THIRD CASTLING, by *Lars Gustafsson*. Trans. by *Yvonne L. Sandstroem*. New Directions. $19.95.

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Gustafsson works with a freedom in which one can suppose at will, "without any *ontological obligation*." There appears to be an unbridgeable gap between the lively interior life of the old poet, who has played his career too safely, and the pallid post-Romantic poems on which his reputation rests. During a ghastly, acerbically rendered power-lunch with a businesstype-publisher, the failing poet appears to compose at last his one authentic poem, but time runs out before he can write it down. The names of characters in the first tale reappear in the second, attached to new selves, as do fragments of Baudelaire and bits of narrative that have crossed from one story into the next. As they continue to cross into the life of the third Bernard, a sixteen-year-old genius and *poète maudit* with access to an Oracle, the skeleton of a murdered sheriff, who lectures in the manner of a pedantic German professor who has read Lacan. A teen-age orphan and outlaw, fleeing from the imprisoning solicitude of the Welfare State, he is driven into an underground life in passages beneath a Swedish city—a dark inverse of the Parisian arcades. (The Sweden portrayed, littered with druggy, alcoholic youth and stifled by bureaucracy, is far from the Liberal Paradise we were once taught to admire.) The young Bernard's all-too-literal reading of Baudelaire is fatal. But before his youth vanishes and "all the zeppelins of my childhood will be passing through clouds of stone," he may have written, or combined, the thriller of the first Bernard Foy and the poetry of the second.

It is not an intricate scheme that makes this novel rewarding, of course, but Gustafsson's finely invented details and his ability to harmonize disparate worlds and parodies of styles. What may it be "about," other than its own virtuosity of learning, wit and sympathy? Possibly, a meditation on communal subjectivity, combined with Baudelaire's sense that urban life is "fertile in poetic and supernatural subjects," a zone in which "the *merveilleux* envelopes us and answers our needs like the atmosphere." Gustafsson describes his fiction as a "detective story and reconstruction of *Les Fleurs du mal*." How that reconstruction takes place, I am not clever enough to see. The text itself, for all its darkness, seems free from Romantic angst or guilt, and is suffused with a geniality and pathos that offer a gesture of absolution to Baudelaire, as if to release him from purgatory, if he's still there.

Flaubert devised the ideal of writing a book about nothing. In *Dictionary of the Khazars*, Milovad Pavić approaches one limit of that ideal: yet it's not *quite* about nothing.[2] Or it's about such an excess of things, so many clues and branching paths, that each fragment of

[2] DICTIONARY OF THE KHAZARS: A Lexicon Novel, by *Milorad Pavić*. Trans. by *Christina Pribićević-Zorić*. Knopf. $19.95.

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narrative places under erasure or cancels out another. In this maze, this game of Dungeons and Dragons for the sophisticated, Pavić keeps one reading at first for the moment to moment amusement of his richly embroidered surface, and then for the perverse obsession to discover if there is any foundation whatsoever to the history of the Khazars, any authority, even fictional authority, to certify the tales, legends, manuscripts, shards of anthropology, folklore, linguistics and polyglot scholarship gathered in the dictionary. To read is to observe the book one reads, the very concept "book," dissolve before one's eyes.

> "I work with something like a dictionary of colors," Nikon added [he is a figure of Satan], "and from it the observer composes sentences and books, in other words, images. You could do the same with writing. Why shouldn't someone make up a dictionary of words that make up one book and let the reader himself assemble the words into a whole?"
>
> Nikon Sevast then turned to the window, pointed with his brush to the field outside, and said:
>
> "Do you see that furrow? It is not a plow that made it. That furrow was made by the barking of a dog."

In Khazar-land you come to accept that possibility, as you accept the problematics of "Shaitan's Fingering" for music,

> showing that it used an eleventh finger; according to legend, the shaitan used his ten fingers and his tail to play it. Some say Shaitan's Fingering originally meant something quite different—the step-by-step procedure for making gold or the order in which fruits were to be planted . . . they say that only later, when it was applied to music, did it turn into a fingering, whereby one wisdom buried and covered up another, older wisdom. Hence, its secret can be translated from one into another of man's senses, without losing any of its effectiveness.

The *Dictionary* is a palimpsest of scholarship complete with battery of preliminary notes, appendices, bibliographies, illustrations and photo reproductions of Renaissance title pages and double-columned Hebrew-Latin text. In fact, there are three dictionaries, three sets of alphabetically-arranged encyclopedia articles, one each from Christian, Islamic and Jewish sources. As with any encyclopedia, the reader is free to browse through the entries *ad libitum*: one is no wiser for privileging any sequence. The convenience of alphabetical order allows us to begin, if we choose, with the (irreconcilable) Jewish, Islamic and Christian interpretations of the role played in Khazar history by the beautiful Princess Ateh. The Khazars, we gather, were a highly elaborated civilization in a world coded utterly differently

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from ours. They flourished in Eastern Europe from c. the third to the ninth centuries. At some time their leader, the Khagan, staged the great Khazar Polemic at which representatives of Islam, Judaism and Christianity each made the case for his religion. (The Christian spokespersons were those industrious proselytizers, SS. Cyril and Methodius. The Jewish chronicler of the polemic was the great poet-philosopher Judah Halevi [twelfth century].) The Khazars adopted one of those religions, and vanished into it—which one depends upon which historian-interpreters you trust, and they are far from disinterested. No substantial trace remains, beyond an infinite regress of traces, and it is possible that the Khazar language has been preserved only by having been taught to parrots, who teach it from age to age to other parrots.

Interest in the Khazars revived in the seventeenth century, and again in the early 1980s. At each stage Jewish, Christian and Islamic scholars compete for the soul of Khazardom through industry, (mis)interpretation, fabulation, skulduggery and necromancy. The *Dictionary* records the Byzantine accidents of textual transmission and the comic pathos of hermeneutical endeavors to arrive at truths of vanished pasts. All this is complicated by the transmigration of souls, or the power of some souls to dream their way into others. The Khazars and their seventeenth-century barbarous pursuers may still be among us. Pavić's "novel," by the way, is available in two versions, male and female, which differ in a single paragraph. Let me assure the reader that only cultists need both.

Serendipity, I must add, tripped up my ignorance and caught me in Pavić's game. Having decided that the whole business was pure invention, I discovered, under "Cyril" in my 1935 *Columbia Encyclopedia*, that SS. Cyril and Methodius are indeed said to have visited the Khazars, where they "learned the language and converted many." Turning to "Khazar," however, I found that "In the 8th cent., the *khakan* (ruler) of the Khazars was converted, with his followers, to Judaism." Isadore Epstein's history of Judaism next instructed me that Judah Halevi wrote a defense of Judaism and religion in general in the form of a dialogue between a Jewish scholar and the King of the Khazars. It's called the *Kuzari*, and Halevi wrote it in Arabic. One might spend months of research "tryin' to make it real," as the popular song says, "compared to what." This *Dictionary* will seem to many the last word in decadence and triviality. My Paterian defense is to say that it produced for me a music not quite like anything I'd heard before.

Horst Bienek's virtuosity in *Earth and Fire* is not that of display, but of classical restraint before the unfolding of a history which allows no

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time for games.[3] This is a vivid reconstruction of the lives of the author's fellow townspeople in Gleiwitz in Upper Silesia, of those who remained and those who fled during the first weeks of 1945, as Hitler's Reich collapsed and Soviet troops pressed in from the East. The final volume of a tetralogy, the *Gleiwitz Suite, Earth and Fire* reads like a self-contained work. Bienek's epigraph from *Great Expectations* is perfectly chosen: "We can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours than we can see to the bottom of this river." Short chapters move back and forth among a large cast of major and minor characters coping with rumor, event and self-preservation on a day by day basis. The Party bosses, the rich, the army, even the police, have pulled out. The sudden absence of Nazi authority creates a grimly carnivalesque space. Life runs as best it can on automatic: streetcars continue to appear, the cinema offers light entertainment, children come for their piano lessons. A fifteen-year-old member of the Hitler Youth (apparently Bienek's memory of himself), creates a private world in an abandoned mansion, where he finds a copy of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*; enchanted by this book, he quotes what, within this context, can only sound like insane slush. Looting, hoarding, disorder increase; people are forced into minutely calculated ethical decisions. An abandoned servant refuses to steal the dresses of her beloved mistress, but decides that those of the mistress' sister-in-law are fair game. Forced laborers from captured territories, mostly Ukrainian, rise up against the mixed German-Polish population in an orgy of rape and plunder, yet don't look forward to Soviet liberation: "Yesterday Gitler [sic], today tovarishch, *nix*, *malchik*. All fascist."

The townspeople have no source of reliable information other than the sound of approaching Soviet guns. A boy parrots what he has heard from his father: "We must vanquish our fear. Then we will overcome the enemy. Our new weapons will soon be operational, the V-2 is a terrible weapon, it will undoubtedly decide the war." Bands of prisoners from Auschwitz are driven through Gleiwitz. "Anyone who's been in Auschwitz keeps his mouth shut," says an old man who takes his comfort in late Beethoven. "They're evacuating the camp. Which means they're leaving us to our fate." One thing is clear: all signs of a Nazi past must vanish:

> "You want I should spell it out, Herr Neighbor?" Herr Mazura was losing patience. "All right, you gotta burn swastika flags and all Führer pictures, and every book with a Führer picture in it. When the Russians see them things in a house, they blow it up. And better burn your railroader uniform too. They might think it was something connected with the SS."

[3] EARTH AND FIRE, by *Horst Bienek*. Trans. by *Ralph Manheim*. Atheneum. $19.95.

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The humble citizens of Gleiwitz are not the only ones re-writing their lives. In a bold stroke of art, Bienek offers a fully-rendered portrait of the aged Gerhart Hauptmann, a native of Silesia, living in protected splendor, first at his castle, later as a refugee in a spa on the outskirts of Dresden. Bienek does not remind us of Hauptmann's past, but the reader should remember that the socially-conscious author of *The Weavers*, hero of Socialist workers in Weimar days, had been influential in bringing Hitler to power with a notorious "I vote *Ja*" in the plebiscite of 1933. He thought his meeting with the Führer comparable to that of Goethe's with Napoleon. In mid-February 1945, a consumer of his own Nobel-Prized reputation, he produces loftily outmoded rhetoric about the transcendence of Art. With self-deluded sincerity Hauptmann revises his own history, distancing himself from the Nazis with snobbish sneers about "brown barons" who have profaned the word "German," people with whom "I have nothing in common." In the finest scene of this novel, Hauptmann weeps as he watches the savage American bombing of Dresden, then produces appropriately self-regarding rhetoric for the media: "I do not consider myself important enough to imagine that fate selected me personally to witness this horror in what is almost the most beloved part of my world. . . . Do not chide me with the word 'weeping': the great heroes of antiquity, among them Pericles, were not ashamed to use it."

It is odd to think that as war blazed through Europe, a publisher in Turin was issuing Alberto Savinio's gossamer fiction-memoir of a childhood in the high-bourgeois expatriate world of Athens at the turn of the century. His mandarin irony, in *Childhood of Nivasio Dolcemare*, appears in a particularly well-written translation by Richard Pevear (see also his translation from Savinio's *Nuova Enciclopedia*, which contains additional fragments of Nivasio's life, in *The Hudson Review* for Summer 1981).[4] In 1910, together with his brother, the painter Giorgio de Chirico, Savinio hit Paris, where a youthful charm and man-of-all-arts eclecticism landed him in the circles of Apollinaire, Picasso, Cocteau, et al. Later, André Breton decided that Savinio had been pre-war Paris' proto-surrealist. After the War, Savinio returned to Paris, writing, designing stage sets, composing music, and painting. He seems almost deliberately to have turned himself into a charming footnote to an era. In later life he returned to Italy where, Pevear informs us, he "suggested the forming of a society whose members would pledge to remain unaware of Mussolini's existence and never to speak his name, 'for hygienic reasons'." Savinio mocked Fascism "by following its nationalist language program to the letter." In place of the foreign *chauffeur*, for example, he would say *riscaldatore*. This all must really have stung Mussolini.

[4] CHILDHOOD OF NIVASIO DOLCEMARE, by *Alberto Savinio*. Trans. by *Richard Pevear*. Introduction by *Dore Ashton*. Eridanos Press. $21.00.

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To read these memoirs of a provincial belle époque in the "limp drawing-room of Europe" is like being in the presence of a gifted raconteur who knows how to elaborate entertaining language from the smallest of givens. Nivasio's birth, baptism, boyhood search for God, his parents' problems with servants, and his classic first encounters with Venus, are pretexts for a series of vignettes and mini-epiphanies. They are amusing in a bittersweet way ("bittersweet" being the pun in Dolcemare). We listen to Eleanora Duse intoning late Romantic nonsense before the Parthenon, surrounded by international "Society" of Athens.

> No applause followed the final phrase as it soared moonwards, but a noble shudder ran through the audience.

When a general who has a hard time with Culture hears that Duse's recitation is considered sublime and unforgettable, he "did not bat an eye, but for the first time in his life he doubted his own intelligence." Nivasio's father, the Commendatore, thinks the family should hear Duse in D'Annunzio's *La Città Morta*, but his mother

> who was readjusting an arrangement of dahlias in a Chinese vase, said:
>
> "Countess Minciaki tells me that *La Città Morta* is in verse."
>
> "In verse?" Commendatore Visiano repeated. And the discussion went no further.

The Childhood of Nivasio Dolcemare is no surrealist work, but surrealist sensibility gave Savinio's eye a permanent cast. This produces a prose in which reality remains in place, just slightly askew. Here is a lady riding in the newly-invented electric phaeton through the city of Pericles:

> The nonchalant driver sat in front. He manipulated the tiller with a gloved hand. . . . Behind him sat the Lady. The Lady of Ladies. Bunches of fat grapes hung from her towering coiffure, and wood grouse fluttered in it. . . . Balanced in the point-lace of her gloved hand, the fringe of her parasol poured over the folded top like the leaves of a weeping willow. The Lady's face was enamel, her eyes crystal, her smile coral. Which face, eyes, and smile she turned now right, now left, greeting the empty street, the crowd that was not there, like a queen without subjects, the Empress of the Void.

Hoping to have escaped that Void, distanced from a society of "fathomless vacuity and incommensurable idiocy," elusively ironic about himself as a product of it, behind the mask "Nivasio Dolcemare" is Alberto Savinio playing hide-and-seek.

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TOM WILHELMUS

The Possibility of a More Public Criticism

ABOUT THREE-FOURTHS OF THE WAY THROUGH the essay "Reading Denis Donoghue," Bruce Bawer—author of *Diminishing Fictions: Essays on the Modern American Novel and Its Critics*—abandons his criticism of Donoghue's inability to "come to anything resembling a clear conclusion" and his theories that come "too close for comfort to the gamesmanship of Derrida & Co." and pays the scholar a genuine tribute.[1] When Donoghue writes *reviews*, says Bawer, he can "do something he can avoid doing in scholarly essays: namely to render critical opinions, and to do so succinctly." And the result is often "cleverly phrased and wonderfully sensible."

Such statements reflect a central conviction of Bruce Bawer's criticism. If there is one thing that this young, freelance writer (albeit with a Ph.D. in American literature) does not wish to be, it is an academic critic. He wants nothing so precious or obtuse, nothing that engages him or his work in obscure linguistic or philosophical subtleties or jangles in concert with the other players in the deconstructionist breeze. His is a public criticism, and as a result he writes not for scholarly journals (he calls the MLA an "organization capable of publishing an almost completely unreadable journal") but for widely-circulated magazines and newspapers where he can, himself, "render opinions" freely and with flair, in prose that is succinct, clever, and sensible. Consequently, he writes reviews. Of the twenty-nine essays in the current volume, twenty-six or twenty-seven fall into that *genre*. Impatient with the praise of the marginal and inconsequential that goes on behind ivy-covered walls, Bawer prizes, on the other hand, a quite *un*academic exchange of ideas among individuals who have opinions, who make judgments, and who acquit themselves with clarity and style. In his hands the review essay gains new status as a form of *public* critical discourse.

Where Bawer developed these convictions is not hard to find. At thirty-three, he is a man of his own generation. Although he sometimes sounds like a throwback to F.R. Leavis or H.L. Mencken, he is also a convincingly up-to-date neo-conservative of the 1980s. Eleven

[1] DIMINISHING FICTIONS: Essays on the Modern American Novel and Its Critics, by *Bruce Bawer*. Graywolf Press. $18.50.

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of the essays in this volume originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, a neo-conservative magazine of the arts edited by Hilton Kramer. Others have appeared in such publications as *Commentary* and *The American Spectator* for which Bawer also regularly writes film criticism. And in addition to borrowing occasionally the direct language and impatient demeanor of conservative writers like Allan Bloom and William Bennett, Bawer attacks many of the same ideas and deplores many of the same excesses as these thinkers. Nonetheless, I do not think his work is doctrinaire. What he appears to share with these writers is not an agenda but a kind of openness (some would call it an innocence) to outlooks and possibilities emergent in the last decade, a belief in, among other things, the collective ability to reject private self-interest and to engage in a more public discourse, one in which individuals can, through common sense and sound reason, find consensus and cure the malaise that has settled over us.

Such beliefs are certainly out of keeping with the majority of intellectual opinion in the twentieth century, particularly among students of literature—a state of affairs that has led both to a literature and to a criticism incapable of speaking to us in public ways. At least that is Bawer's conviction, and it leads him to the conclusion, announced in his title, that modern fiction is "a diminished thing." In the first part, for instance, he analyzes and condemns the current intellectual climate for shortcomings only a true exponent of Bloom or E.D. Hirsch might appreciate. In one report on the 1983 Modern Language Association convention entitled "Derrida's Dullards, Woolf's Womyn," he charges the academy with raising the level of triviality and obfuscation to new heights of trendy but shallow intellectualism. In another, "The Novel in the Academy," he reviews Frederick R. Karl's *American Fictions 1940–1980: A Comprehensive History and Critical Evaluation* and challenges the academy's belief "that the more impenetrable a novel is, the greater the likelihood that it's *real* literature." Elsewhere, in a review of Charles Newman's *The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation*, he attacks the contemporary intellectual's penchant for silly theorizing, in this case Newman's taste for crypto-Marxist, econo-babble: "One can only marvel at Newman's assumption that the best way to talk about literature is to talk about economics; at his view of the American economy as a tragedy not because it has failed . . . but because it has been too successful; and at his blaming of that economy for the slovenly state of a species of fiction whose lack of discipline and love of aimless excess can be traced directly back to 60s radicalism."

Such a statement may have its own excesses, but on the whole Bawer's willingness to raise such questions may provide a healthy corrective to a blind enthusiasm for extreme positions and bland acceptance of literary (as well as liberal) dogma that have characterized much contemporary literary discussion. After all a person who can pause to criticize "The Story of English" on PBS for its uncritical

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acceptance of linguistic change whenever it occurs—who insists that "there can be both good changes in language (changes that make it more precise, majestic, and profound) and bad changes (those that make it more fuzzy and simpleminded)" and that we should acknowledge them—is a man on a mission. And as if to prove that the uncontrolled, self-promoting entrepreneurial spirit is also a danger to good sense and good taste, Bawer's skewering, at length and in detail, of the whole history of the *Pushcart Prize* is worth the attention of anyone engaged with the arts and crafts dimension of litbiz.

The title essay, with its epigraph from Frost ("The question . . . is what to make of a diminished thing") is Bawer's most generalized autopsy on the body of contemporary fiction, in which he traces the origins of the illness to post-World War II writers' unwillingness to represent "courage, character, moral strength, beauty, truth, devotion"—even in terms of their tragic loss. As the result of a lack of ideals or passion, writers have become fascinated with metafiction and the "workshop novel," preoccupied with the self or passing political fashion, paranoid about the ability of inanimate systems to govern the lives of individual human beings, seduced by "knee-jerk, new-wave nihilism," or obsessed with questions of form—while at the same time exhibiting an inartistic absence of style and narrative facility in their own work. Metafiction is one price literature pays for its collusion with the academy and its overweening interest in intellectual processes and theories. Workshop fiction—"spare, elliptical exercises in tone, metaphor, and (above all) obsessive surface detail that . . . seem[s] deliberately shorn of passion, force, animation, and originality"—is another. The essay is an interesting diagnosis, not perhaps for its thoroughness or its careful weighing and balancing of issues, but for the challenge it poses to a variety of received ideas about the origins, value, and effectiveness of contemporary fiction.

The second part of *Diminishing Fictions* reviews books by and about writers of the past generation—Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and Glenway Wescott—and discusses the manner in which their reputations affect (or in Wescott's case, fail to affect) both us and their biographers. Here Bawer provides ample evidence that he is a thorough and thoughtful student of the American literature of this century, his desire to pass rapidly from complex analysis to summary judgments notwithstanding. He makes an important point that "for Americans of a literary bent, the lives of Tom, Scott, and Ernest are (for better or worse) our great national legends—our answer, if you will, to the Greek myths, the Icelandic sagas, and *Beowulf*—which, partly for inspirational and partly for cautionary purposes, we feel compelled to rehearse periodically." This fact accounts for the spate of biographies, good and bad, which keep bringing these authors to our attention. Bawer compares Fitzgerald to Cheever in both their efforts "not so much to 'find themselves,' as to create themselves." He compares Hemingway to Eliot in both writers' desire "to isolate

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Truth—which, to Eliot and Hemingway alike, was the most valuable and elusive of commodities" and which, despite the hypercivilized character of one and the ungenteel qualities of the other "inspired both of them to cultivate a semblance of authority—one as pedagogue, the other as Papa."

Such lives appear heroic to us, according to Bawer, because of the unheroic character of our own times. Thomas Wolfe especially somehow "never grew beyond the happy fecundity of the clever adolescent." As a consequence, Bawer reserves his most elaborate praise for Glenway Wescott, the neglected homosexual novelist of the same generation who, despite suffering alienation and deracination similar to other members of the lost generation, was hardly a modernist at all, rather "a foursquare anti-modernist and a lover of small, elegant, well-ordered books that attempt to illuminate a character or a situation."

Armed with these convictions, when he turns, in the third part of this volume, to reviews of works by current writers with mature reputations—Salinger, Capote, Mailer, Bellow, Hawkes, Davenport, Doctorow, DeLillo, Updike, and Tom Wolfe—Bawer finds little which is appealing. Salinger grew so fascinated with "his characters' emotionally retarded behavior" that he "lost all interest in plot, pace, characterization, conflict," and his last works especially are little more than "letters to himself—gospels, as it were, about the Glass family, that private pantheon of eternally puerile Olympians." As he grew older, Capote, too, neglected "his obligation as a literary artist to create, to order, and thereby to serve not merely personal and superficial truths but universal ones." Mailer "renounced the barrier between life and art, and persists in thinking of himself and his loved ones as characters to be shaped, developed, put through paces." In all these judgments, Bawer argues for a more conservative and traditional—one might even say classical—view of the artist's responsibilities to art, life, and the reading public.

One might expect, therefore, that Bellow would receive higher marks from Bawer because of his more traditional approach to such things as character and plot. But while this is *relatively* true, in by far the longest essay in the book, "Talking Heads: The Novels of Saul Bellow," Bawer is unreserved in praising only *Seize the Day* for its sharpness of focus, universality, and "earned resolution." Otherwise, Bellow's long, rambling novels—with their nearly interchangeable characters, methods, and love of abstractions—subject the reader only to a barrage of ideas for which he is allowed to feel no corresponding emotions. "Indeed," says Bawer, all of Bellow's protagonists "sound as if they're on their way to the same symposium."

In this essay and elsewhere, Bawer can occasionally be accused of an excess of zeal; for while I happen to agree with his general assessment of Bellow's work (as, indeed, I tend to agree with him generally), occasionally he may sound simply anti-intellectual. For example,

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when he calls Bellow "one of the most intelligent—perhaps *the* most intelligent—of novelists working today" but then questions "how distinguished his novels are, *as novels*," he merely begs a long series of questions about what truly intelligent behavior consists of in a novelist and what the nature of novels themselves is supposed to be. Similarly, his desire to prove that John Hawkes's reputation is merely the product of the clever agreement among academics like Albert J. Guerard, Leslie Fiedler, and William Gass, may simply blind him to Hawkes's real achievement. And where Bawer finds evidence in Hawkes of academia's fascination with "literature-as-emetic," another critic might find evidence of a more Rabelaisian carnality. Is it possible to detect a certain unctuousness in these and other attacks by Bawer on writers who don't conform closely enough to his own conceptions: on Doctorow, for instance, who "fails to recognize that the novel's path to truth leads, of necessity, through the human soul"; on DeLillo, whose novels really only amount to "documents in the history of nihilistic chic"?

I confess, also, that I do not understand Bawer's praise of Guy Davenport for qualities that seem opposite to the standard of accessibility, orderliness, intelligibility, and narrative consistency that he applies elsewhere in this volume—for Davenport's "plucking his protagonists from the most rarefied purlieus of twentieth-century intellectual and cultural history," for his "profusion of philosophical tidbits, cross-cultural references, dropped names, and foreign words," and for his "obsession with ideas [which] goes hand-in-hand with a profound suspicion of them." Nonetheless, barring an occasional glitch, Bawer's overall assessments and his preference for writers like Updike and Tom Wolfe (in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*)—who are thoughtful and stylish and who display a concern for the common good—strike me as refreshing.

Bawer concludes with three essays, two of which contain a series of brief reviews of works by younger writers and a third ("The Literary Brat Pack") which is a striking exposé of how a group of youngsters, all products of "Gordon Lish's workshop at Yale," has attained virtually instantaneous celebrity through clever self-promotion. Echoing the ideas of the title essay, Bawer complains once more of the younger writers' solipsism, their flat characters, "dry and passionless" prose, "jejune" plots, and surfaces "crowded with banal domestic details." With few exceptions (among slightly older writers, like Wendell Berry and Peter Taylor, or writers whose narrative instincts seem rich and clear, like Louise Erdrich), Bawer holds out little hope for contemporary fiction as it is revealed in the newer generation's work.

Nonetheless, I conceive of Bruce Bawer's criticism as a criticism of hope—hope for a literature and a criticism based on good sense, reason, and the right to make pointed judgments. His is that part of the message of the eighties that sophisticates sneer at—those con-

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vinced that the public domain is always, inevitably splintered into self-interested groups among whom no consensus is possible. In their view, writers and critics speak only for themselves and only to a carefully researched, narrowly defined series of audiences, and their purpose is not to teach or to entertain or to criticize but rather to advertise (the point, I take it, of Bawer's comments about the *Pushcart Prize* and the Literary Brat Pack). In such an environment also, the university and the English Department—which in better times might have considered themselves servants of a public ideal—grow subtle, dogmatic, highly codified, authoritarian, and concerned about marketing their own expertise. They, too, appear to have accepted a doctrine in which it is no longer necessary for literary works to speak clearly and intelligently about familiar human concerns or for criticism to support that effort. Under such circumstances, would it be wise to engage in a more public criticism? Who, they seem to ask, would even think so?

Bruce Bawer thinks so.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GEORGE WATSON is a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge. His new book, *The Certainty of Literature*, will be published by Simon & Schuster in September. . . . CHARLES TOMLINSON's *Annunciations* is due out from Oxford this fall. He has recently recorded all of his published verse for the University of Keele archive, together with a reading of *The Waste Land*. . . . HAROLD FROMM has just completed a book on politics and professionalism in literary studies that includes essays of his that first appeared in *The Hudson Review*. . . . ROBERT McDOWELL's poem, *"The Fifties,"* which originally appeared in *The Hudson Review*, has been selected by Donald Hall to appear in the 1989 edition of *The Best American Poetry*. The publisher of Story Line Press, he has completed one novel and is working on another. . . . GILBERTO PEREZ teaches film history at Sarah Lawrence College. . . . MARK JARMAN's next book, *The Black Riviera*, is due out in the spring of 1990 from Wesleyan University Press. His first book, *North Sea* (originally published in 1978), will be reissued this summer by Cleveland State University Press. . . . ROBERT PHILLIPS' most recent collection is *Personal Accounts: New & Selected Poems 1966-86* (Ontario Review Press). . . . MICHAEL McFEE's* poems in this issue are from his second book, *Vanishing Acts*, which will be published this fall by Gnomon Press (Box 475, Frankfort, Kentucky 40602).

BARRY SPACKS is "visiting professor" at the University of California at Santa Barbara. His latest collection of poems is *Brief Sparrow* (Los Angeles Press Illuminati, 1988). . . . JAMES FINN COTTER has been writing and speaking about Gerard Manley Hopkins as part of the centenary of the poet's death. . . . DICK ALLEN is Charles A. Dana Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at the University of Bridgeport. His *Flight and Pursuit* was published by Louisiana State University Press in November 1987. . . . The National Endowment for the Humanities has awarded DEAN FLOWER a grant to do a comparative study of narrativity in Hitchcock and Nabokov this summer. . . . GEORGE KEARNS teaches nineteenth-century and modern British and American literature at Rutgers University. His new study of Pound's *Cantos* will be published by Cambridge University Press this fall.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

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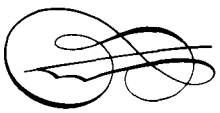

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IN THIS ISSUE:

In fact, she had already grown tired of him. She resented how much he needed her and was embarrassed by the way he clung to her in public. She felt sorry for him, too, the way one feels pity for a dependent dog, so she repressed the urge to tell him to piss off, to go back to New York or find his own place for a while. She hoped he would get the message, but his stubborn refusal to do so made her brazen. She stayed out later and later, and one night she did not come back at all.

—Robert McDowell,
"It Should Never Happen to You," p. 222.

Perhaps it was Caliban who devised for him [Ingmar Bergman] the following marriage scenario: he married Else Fisher in 1943, betrayed her with Ellen Lundström whom he married in 1945, left her for Gun Hagberg whom he married in 1951, betrayed her with Harriet Andersson in 1952, who was eventually replaced by Bibi Andersson in 1955, who was then replaced by Käbi Laretei whom he married in 1959, who was replaced by Liv Ullmann in 1965, who left him and was replaced by Ingrid von Rosen, whom he married in 1971. Most of these women were artists and performers like himself—dancer, choreographer, journalist, actress, pianist. Several of them left husbands and children to marry him. Many of them bore him children (nine, all told).

—Dean Flower,
"Ingmar Bergman's Autobiography in Film," p. 330.

Some of the best theatre in New York is produced by minority groups. Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Jews, French, Italians, Irish, homosexuals, Orientals, find theatre the best medium for exploring their problems because, despite McLuhan and the mystique of electronic media, it is the most efficient way such groups have of communicating among themselves.

—Richard Hornby, "Minority Theatre," p. 283.

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